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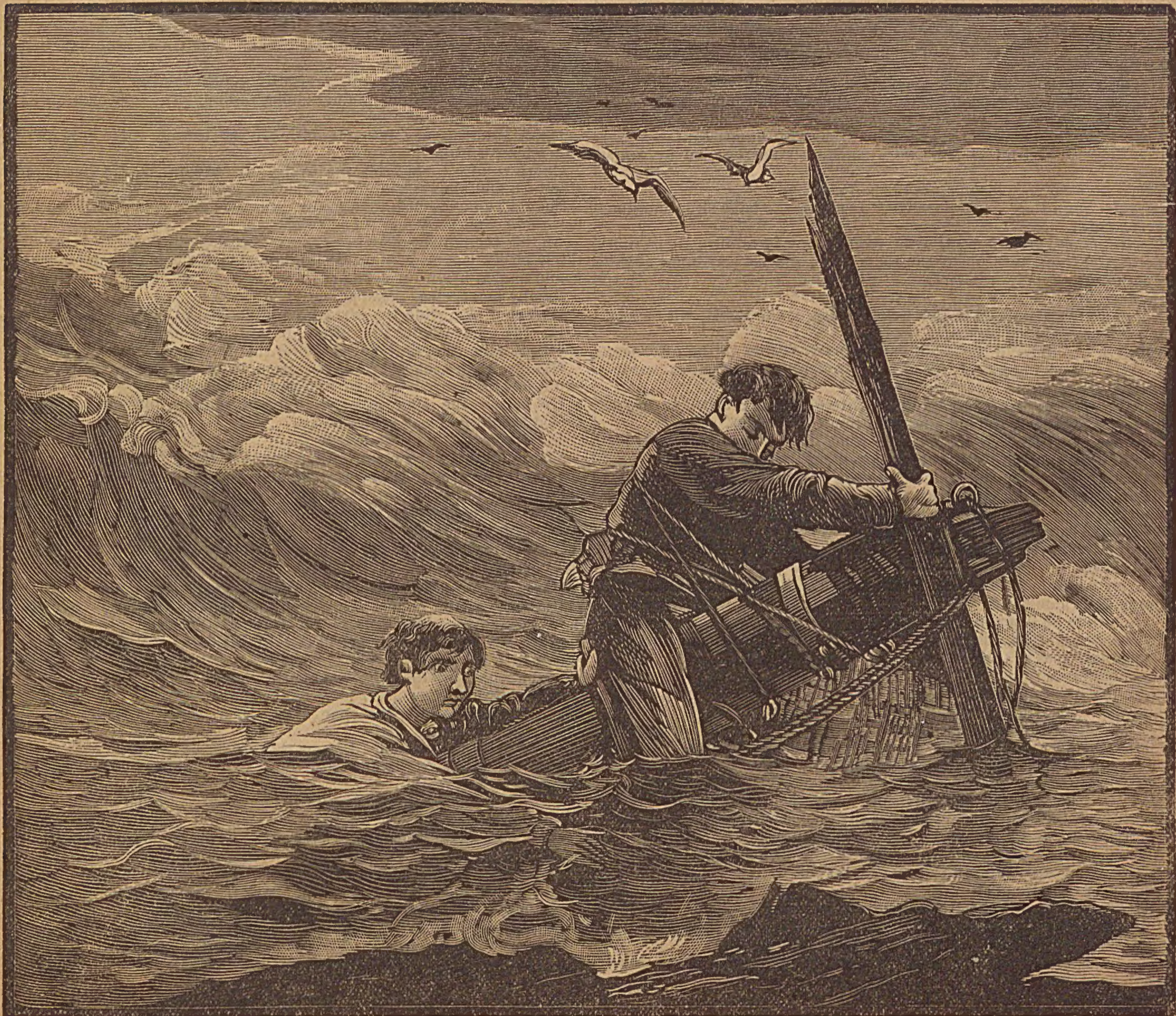
Vol. II.

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The Phantom Light-House;

The Mystery of the
or, Storm-Coast.

By ROGER STARBUCK.



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The Phantom Light-House;

OR,

The Mystery of the Storm Coast.

By ROGER STARBUCK,

Auteur of "The Skeleton Island; or, A Cruise in an Underground River," "The Castaways of Iceland," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE RESCUE.

"HERE it comes! I am caught in the typhoon!"

Thus in a voice of dismay exclaimed Charley Warner, a bright looking boy of sixteen.

There he was, rapidly pursuing his solitary way through the depths of a small but dense forest on one of the lonely Bahama keys or islands that, stretching away from the Florida coast, extend far out into the Atlantic ocean.

The boy lived on this island with his father, a widower, in a small house built of stone, situated about a mile from the forest.

The lad had left home for a walk early in the morning, to be suddenly overtaken by the storm, which had given but slight warning of its approach.

The force of the wind was tremendous.

It blew a perfect hurricane, with rain, thunder and lightning.

A pall like darkness overhung the island.

The peals of thunder and the electric flashes were incessant.

It seemed to Charley as if he were constantly surrounded by rings of fire.

There were no very large trees in the forest.

Large enough they were, however, to render the lad's situation one of great peril.

The branches, breaking off, were swept along in all directions, and some of the trees, torn up by the roots, were whirled crashing about the path of the lonely wanderer.

He hurried on.

A hundred yards ahead of him was the edge of the forest, with many hummocks extending beyond.

Through openings in these hummocks were visible in the distance, the storm-tossed waters of the ocean, broken into enormous spray-covered seas.

At last, after narrowly escaping the fate of being crushed to death by trees or branches, the lad emerged from the forest.

No sooner had he done so, than the wind lifted him a little from his feet, and sent him rolling and tumbling along the ground.

At length he reached a hollow between two hummocks, where by clutching the long guinea grass, he saved himself from being carried further.

The storm raged with increasing fury.

Now and then a tremendous crash denoted that a tree was struck by lightning.

Charley could feel the effect of the electricity in a tingling sensation through his whole body.

At one time he heard a harsh scream.

Then a frigate-bird, killed by lightning, dropped dead at his feet.

The glazed eyes of the bird were turned toward him.

He shuddered.

Somehow the expression of those eyes, which were of a gray color, like those of his father, reminded him of the latter.

They had the same dull, indifferent, lifeless sort of look as those of his parent, who was a misanthrope, and had come to dwell on this island that he might be far removed from human-kind.

Only three times a year was he visited by certain sailors, belonging to a sloop, who brought him provisions and other necessary articles.

These persons would depart as speedily as possible, as if aware that their presence was obnoxious to this strange man.

An unusual sensation came over Charley, as he compared the dead eyes of the frigate-bird with those of his father.

Was it a presentiment?

The dismal roar and howl of the storm seemed in unison with this feeling.

Gradually, however, the violence of the gale abated.

The clouds broke, the rain ceased to fall, and as the bright sunshine streamed over the palms and the forest, the piping of numerous birds sent forth a glad refrain from the woods.

The wind now blew a light gale.

Charley mounted one of the hummocks and looked about him.

Uprooted trees lay in every direction.

The tall guinea-grass was beaten down flat.

Out of it crept numerous large lizards, with green eyes, as if to dry and warm themselves in the sun.

Huge striped spiders, with water-drenched bodies were also visible, crawling heavily along the ground.

The air was full of gauzy-winged flies and other insects, buzzing and humming.

Looking away toward where the sea came in on some rocks and at the base of a small cliff, Charley suddenly uttered an exclamation.

He fancied he beheld a spar—a broken mast, with a human being lashed to it.

He hurried to the cliff, and presently gained the top of it.

Yes, he could see it plainly enough now. The spar contained a human form—that of a boy.

He was about fifty fathoms off, drifting toward some breakers, a ship's length from the shore.

Charley judged that he was nearly unconscious, as his head hung sideways and his eyes, apparently, were half closed.

Should he be carried among the breakers the spar would be held fast there, and he would soon perish.

As this thought occurred to the watcher, he ran down to the shore, threw off his jacket, cap and shoes, and struck out in a direction which would enable him to pass the reef.

Finally he reached the spar.

He swam alongside the castaway and looked at him.

He was a boy about his own age, of fair complexion, with light chestnut hair, though, being a sailor, his skin was much embrowned.

His eyes were closed, but placing a hand on his breast, Charley could feel his heart beat, and so knew he was alive.

He seized the spar, and swimming vigorously, pushed it along so that it would go clear of the reef.

Finally he got it to the beach.

Then unlash the young sailor from the spar, he drew him up to the foot of a palm tree, and turned him over on his breast. A considerable quantity of salt water was dislodged from the lad's mouth.

Then Charley, seeing a small flask protruding from the sailor's pocket, drew it forth.

It contained brandy, and he poured some of this down the throat of the castaway.

Next he proceeded to chafe the sailor's head and temples with it.

Presently a faint color stole to the boy's cheeks, and he opened a pair of expressive blue eyes with a bewildered look.

In a short time he was able to rise to his feet, and seemed quite restored to health.

"You saved my life?" he said to Charley.

"Yes, but it was neither hard nor perilous work. I simply swam out to you and pushed the spar away from those breakers to the shore."

"It was a plucky deed. I know there must be sharks hereabout."

"There are and voracious ones too, but it chanced that I was not troubled by any."

"Well, it was a brave risk, and I thank you, shipmate."

Charley accepted the proffered hand.

It was not often that he saw lads of his own age and he was glad to meet this one.

"My name is Ben Belton. I belonged to the ship St. George, bound from Cuba to New York," he said. "The typhoon blew away her sticks and capsized her in a moment. What became of the rest of the hands I know not. I clutched the spar you found me clinging to, lashed myself to it, and, in a very short time, the spray and the seas breaking over me nearly drowned me as you saw."

CHAPTER II.

THE VICTIM OF THE STORM.

"VERY fortunate you were to escape with your life in such a hurricane," said Charley.

"Ay, ay, you may well say that," answered Ben. "But for my having lashed myself so that my head was well up above the spar, I must have gone."

"Come home with me, and you shall have refreshments and dry clothing."

The young sailor thanked his preserver.

Then he said in some surprise:

"You live on this island?"

"I do, with my father."

"It is very singular. I thought all these small keys were uninhabited."

"They are, I believe, except this one on which for six years father and I have dwelt."

"Do you not feel very lonesome here?"

"I will own that I do. But father now and then allows me to go to St. Augustine, Florida, where I have friends—former school-mates—as I once went to school there."

"Does your father like to live here?"

"Yes. He is what some people would call a strange man. He cares nothing for his kind. He was formerly a surgeon, but of course he is now retired from practice. Still I believe he loves his profession. He is often shut up for whole days in his study, among his books, skulls and skeletons."

Ben colored.

"Perhaps I had better not go there. I would not like to intrude," he said.

"You mistake. Though father is a misanthrope, he is ever keenly alive to distress of any kind—ever ready to extend a helping hand to those whom he sees in trouble."

Thus reassured, Ben followed his young conductor, who, having resumed the attire he had thrown off for his swim was now moving toward the wood.

"It must have been some trouble to bring the material here for a house?" remarked the young sailor.

"It was. Father had the stone and other material brought here from St. Augustine, where we formerly lived. The workmen were also from that place. The house was finished six years ago."

"You have dwelt on this key, then, for six years?"

"Yes, and I am familiar with every nook and corner of it."

Through the thicket, over fallen trees and broken branches, the boys made their way, for half a mile, when they emerged from the woods.

Some distance ahead, built on a rising piece of ground, they then saw the stone house.

It was not a large one, and was made low, with a sloping roof and a broad piazza at the front side.

Between it and the place where the boys now were, cocoanut trees a few mossy rocks, among the latter of which was a sparkling cascade, met the eye.

"I see a human head projecting above those two rocks," said the quick-eyed sailor, pointing out the object to his companion.

As they drew nearer Charley exclaimed:

"It is father! He stands between those two rocks watching us. Strange, though, he does not come forward to meet us."

The boys kept on, but Mr. Warner never moved.

There he stood with his gaze steadily fixed on the two lads.

Still nearer, and a cry of dismay broke from Charley.

"Father! father!" he cried.

There was no reply.

The face of Mr. Warner was as white as chalk and his eyeballs were glazed.

Charley sprang forward and laid a hand on his father's shoulder.

It was as rigid as stone.

"He is dead!" cried the boy aghast.

Ben pointed to a round black spot on the dead man's forehead.

"Struck by lightning!" he said.

"Yes," answered Charley, in a grief-stricken voice. "He must have ventured forth during the storm to look if he could see anything of me and have been struck by a bolt."

"I will help you carry the body, if you wish," said Ben.

"We will have to get a stretcher. There is one in the house."

Charley ran to the house and soon returned dragging a canvas stretcher.

Ben, who had waited for him, helped place the body, which was light and slender, upon the stretcher and the two lads then conveyed it to the house.

Restoratives were used, but Mr. Warner did not recover.

In fact he was dead, as Charley had supposed.

"You should have the body conveyed to St. Augustine for burial," said Ben.

"That cannot be. There is no craft here to take it. Besides, father's wish, often expressed to me, was, that, in case of his death, he should be buried on the beach within a quarter of a mile of the house."

Despite Charley's grief he did not neglect his companion.

He procured some fruits and viands from a pantry, and, spreading them on a table, bade his guest partake of them.

Ben ate sparingly.

The truth was the grief of his young host spoiled his appetite.

Two days later the boys dug a grave in the sand, and there the body of Charley's father was buried.

Then the lads sadly returned to the house.

Charley sat down on the piazza and bowed his face on his hands.

For some time he remained thus, while Ben tried to console him.

His words were not without effect.

The bereaved boy had taken a great liking to the young sailor who had proved himself to be a kind, manly youth.

"We two are now the only inhabitants of this island," Charley at length remarked. "You must make this house your home and stay with me."

"If you wish, I will stay with you until the schooner which you say you expect a fortnight hence comes to the island. Then I will go aboard of her to St. Augustine," was the reply.

"No—no—don't leave me!" pleaded Charley. "Stay with me while I remain on the island. I should be dreadfully lonesome without your company, for you have been a good friend to me."

"Ay, and will continue to be for I like you," answered Ben holding out his hand.

His companion clasped it, and continued:

"We will remain friends for life. You have told me your parents are dead. We are both orphans, and that alone is a strong link between us. Promise me you will not go off aboard the schooner."

"Be it so, I promise," answered Ben.

"Thank you," answered Charley gladly. "And now if you will, I would like your assistance to find a certain hidden vault in my father's cellar. He told me when alive, that if he died I must seek that vault, where I would find something which would be of use to me."

Charley procured a lantern and a spade. Followed by Ben, he descended into the cellar, which was reached by a stone staircase inside the house.

The cellar was a deep one with a sandy bottom.

In some places the sand was damp.

"The cellar is pretty deep for one so near the sea," said Ben.

"You would not have to dig far to come to water."

To and fro moved the boys, but they could discover no vault.

"The entrance must be somewhere under the sand," said Ben.

"Have you a crowbar?"

"Here is one," said Charley, procuring what was required from a corner of the cellar.

Ben took the crowbar and went about probing the sand with the bar.

Suddenly a clanking sound was heard.

The end of the crowbar had evidently come in contact with a slab.

Ben took the spade which Charley had brought with him, and, displacing the sand, revealed a flat, marble slab with a ring attached.

Both boys seized the ring, and, after tugging hard, succeeded in raising the slab on its end. A flight of stone steps was then revealed.

These Charley, holding the lantern, at once proceeded to descend.

Ben was about to follow him, when, all at once, Charley sank like a shot from his sight.

The lantern was extinguished at the same time, and all was darkness.

"Charley! Charley! Where are you?" called Ben.

He felt for the stone staircase with his feet, but it was gone.

His heels stuck only a clump of crumbling sand.

Again he called his friend, but, as before, there came no reply.

He fancied he heard a half-smothered noise—a sort of stifled gasp.

In a moment the young sailor whipped out a match—one of several Charley had furnished him with—from his pocket and lighted it.

From another pocket he produced a piece of tarred ratline stuff, brought with him from his ship, and lighted the end, thus making a torch.

Holding it down over the vault opening, he quickly discovered what had happened.

The steps had given way, and the sands forming the sides of the pit had caved in.

Seven feet below him Ben could see a mixture of water and sand, with the top of Charley's head protruding above it.

The unfortunate lad, held by the sand and water, apparently was strangling to death.

CHAPTER III.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

As Ben looked down at his imperiled friend he could see his head move, and could hear a gasping, gurgling sound, which indicated that he was still alive.

"I must save him!" thought the young sailor.

But how was this to be done?

The pit was seven feet deep, and should Ben descend it he would only share the fate of the other lad.

The youth threw a hasty glance around him.

Suddenly his eye was caught by a chain lying on the floor of the cellar.

He sprang to it and discovered that it was about ten feet long.

It had evidently been used to hold some boat or yawl fast to the shore.

Tying one end of the chain to the middle cellar post, which was within a foot of the vault, Ben twined and secured the other end beneath his arms. Then he slid along the soft, crumbly sand, into the pit.

He sank in the bottom up to his waist.

Then, quickly clutching Charley by the hair of his head with both

hands he contrived to pull him a little above the sand and water, beneath which he had, by this time, nearly disappeared.

The boy sputtered and gasped for breath.

Ben, reaching down with one arm, twined the latter about his breast.

"I have you! You are safe!" he cried.

Still Charley could not speak.

His breath came in long-drawn sobs.

For a few moments Ben feared it would leave him altogether.

He had a hard task before him.

Holding to his friend with one hand, he vainly strove to ascend the chain.

Suddenly he heard a snap.

The chain had been thrown into the cellar because it was old and rusty, and one of the links was half broken.

Looking up, Ben could see, by the light of his still burning torch, which he had stuck in the sand, at the top of the pit, that this link was about to break asunder.

The breaking of the chain would send both boys down into the sand and water, where they would soon perish together.

But, still holding to his burden, the brave lad planted both feet in the sand at the side of the pit.

In this way he lightened the strain upon the weakened link.

He waited full five minutes, hoping that Charley would recover sufficiently to comply with his directions.

At last the half-strangled lad spoke.

"Oh, Ben, is it you?" he gasped.

"Ay!" cried Ben, joyfully, on hearing him speak, "and, now, if you can put both arms about my neck and cling to me, I trust I can get you out of this hole."

Charley at once threw his arms about his friend's neck.

Then Ben commenced the perilous task of trying to ascend by the half broken chain.

Snap! snap! went the breaking link.

The young sailor dug both feet into the sand to lighten the strain.

Slowly—slowly and cautiously, he mounted toward the opening.

Just as he reached the edge of the top, the chain broke.

But Ben was prepared for this.

He had already thrown himself forward, and down he went, flat on his breast, on the floor of the cellar, with Charley still clinging to him, fully three feet away from the opening.

"All right!" he cried. "It was a narrow escape—eh, Charley?"

Feeling very weak, the rescued boy, covered with sand and water, staggered to his feet.

"Well, chummy, how do you feel?" inquired Ben, as he also rose and unfastened the chain from his form.

"I am a little played out," answered Charley, "but I'll soon get over it. Upon my word, it was a gallant rescue," he added, shaking hands with Ben.

"You saved me once, and now I have saved you," laughed Ben.

"We are quits."

Charley led the way up-stairs.

A little camphor and some brandy soon restored his lost strength.

Then he went to his room and changed his attire.

Next he procured another lantern.

"What are you going to do now?" inquired Ben.

"To return to the cellar. We have not yet obtained what my father spoke of, as being in the vault."

"A great mistake was made in putting it, whatever it is, in that vault."

"Father probably relied on the statements of the mason who constructed it, and who, doubtless, told him that if it was carefully cemented it would remain dry—safe from the sea-water."

"Well, the question is now, how are we to reach the bottom of the vault and find its contents? One great difficulty is that we are in the dark as to what we are after."

Charley reflected a moment.

"In my opinion," he said, "it is money."

"Then it should be in a chest."

"Most likely."

"We need, in that case, a very long, stout pole, with a hook at the end. Most treasure-chests have a ring attached to them. If we can catch the ring with the hook, we might contrive to draw up the chest, as it may not be a very large one."

"There is a long boat-hook somewhere about," said Charley. "I will go and look for it. It must be in the lumber room."

He went away and soon returned with the implement.

Down into the cellar went both boys, now provided with a lantern and a boat-hook.

They advanced to the mouth of the caved-in vault.

Ben thrust the pole far down into the sand and water.

"I feel it! I feel it!" he suddenly cried.

"What?"

"Something hard, like the ring of a chest. And now for the pull."

Both boys hauled vigorously on the pole.

They felt something coming up.

"Haul away, Charley. We'll soon see the top of the chest," cried Ben.

They tugged and tugged.

At length something attached to the hook was pulled above the sand and water surface.

Then a cry of horror escaped both boys.

It was a ghastly object they beheld.

In fact, it was nothing less than the head and ribbed breast of a human skeleton.

The hook had caught in the mouth of this skeleton. Thus the head was forced a little back, and the eyeless sockets were turned up towards the lad's.

Under the ribs was something dark.

What was it?

It had the look of a mummy's flesh.

The shuddering lad's hold of the pole weakened, and with a mry sort of hiss the skeleton sank back beneath the sand and water.

"What can it mean?" gasped Charley. "Why did father put one of his skeletons here?"

"God only knows! but don't let go of the pole."

"You mean to haul up the skeleton?"

"Yes."

Charley again seized the pole

Again the boys tugged at it.

The skeleton was finally hauled up so that its dangling legs showed to the keel.

It was a small skeleton, and the lads wondered what made it so heavy.

At last it was pulled up from the mouth of the vault and landed with a rattling sound upon the floor of the cellar.

"Ugh!" ejaculated Charley, drawing back.

But Ben knelt down by the object, holding the lantern so as to examine it closely.

"Halloa!" he cried, in astonishment.

He had placed his hand upon that dark 'something' which filled the cavity of the breast, under the ribs.

"What is it?" inquired Charley, advancing.

"The strangest thing I ever heard of," cried Ben, "a tarred canvas bag stuffed into the breast of a skeleton!"

"Strange enough!" gasped Charley.

Ben next ran his hand over the rib-bones and the head of the object.

Then he burst out laughing.

"How can you laugh?" said Charley.

"See here, chum!" cried Ben, "this is no real skeleton. It is an artificial one, made of the most beautiful polished ivory, which is a fortune in itself!"

Charlie was much relieved.

"Ay, but we have not yet seen what is in the sack."

"How are we to get that out?"

"Easily. The parts of the skeleton are attached by screws, and can be taken off."

As Ben spoke, he worked at one of the ribs, which he soon unscrewed.

All the ivory ribs were thus taken off.

Then the sack, which proved to be very heavy was pulled out.

The top of the sack was fastened together by means of a clasp.

Ben soon found the way to open it.

He held the lantern over it, and the contents of the sack reflected the light.

The bag was stuffed full of twenty-dollar gold pieces.

CHAPTER IV.

PERILOUS VISITORS.

"As your father said, this will certainly prove of use to you," laughed Ben.

"I did not even dream that father had so much money," said Charley.

"It was an ingenious way to place it," said Ben. "The ivory of that skeleton is alone worth more than one hundred dollars."

"Let us count the money," said Charley.

This was done.

There was exactly twenty thousand dollars—all in twenty dollar gold pieces.

"My friend," said Charley, "you will accept from me a little present of five thousand dollars."

"No, no," said Ben, decidedly.

"But I have more than I want. Come, you will do me a favor by —"

But Ben shook his head.

"Not a penny of your money will I take," he said, firmly. "If you offer it again you will offend me. I could never rest if I accepted money which I had not earned, and to which I am in no way entitled."

"Be it so then," said Charley, regretfully.

The money was returned to the bag which was again clasped together.

"We will bury this in the cellar. I will need none of the money for a long time."

"I would advise you to replace in the skeleton," said Ben.

"Why?"

"Don't you see? In case any one should try to rob you and should dig for your treasure he would clear out at sight of the skeleton."

"True, it might be so."

The parts of the skeleton's breast were again screwed over the bag, after which both were buried a foot and a half beneath the sandy floor of the cellar.

The boys then went up into the house, where for a long time they sat talking over their discovery.

Days passed.

The chums became more and more attached to each other.

Charley had a boat in which both often cruised about the island. They fished, hunted and caught turtle. In fact they passed the time together very pleasantly. At length the expected schooner came to the island, bringing provisions and other articles.

Charley took and paid for all. The captain was informed of the death of the boy's father. Ere long he sailed away and finally carried the news to St. Augustine.

One afternoon, a fortnight later, the boys were seated on the front piazza of the house, which commanded a view of the sea, when they sighted an approaching sail.

As she drew nearer Ben surveyed her critically through a spy-glass.

"A black bark, very low in the water. She is heading this way under full sail," he remarked.

"Some vessels after a supply of fresh water, perhaps," said Charley. But Ben looked grave and made no answer.

"I don't like the cut of that craft," he said. "She is suspiciously long and low and her masts have a wicked rake."

"You don't think see is a pirate?" said his companion, laughing. "The days of pirates are past."

"Ay, of regular pirate cruisers," answered Ben. "But sometimes a captain carries within his breast the heart of a pirate."

"What do you think that vessel is?"

"I don't know. I am puzzled, but I should say she was an unlawful craft of some kind."

"A smuggler?"

"Perhaps so."

Meanwhile the bark kept drawing nearer. When she was within half a league of the dangerous coral reefs, near the island, she lowered a boat.

Suddenly, when the boat was within a few fathoms of the beach, Charley, looking through the glass gave a cry of surprise.

"How strange!" he cried, "that man bears a strong resemblance to father!"

"Which one? There are six in the boat."

"The officer in the stern sheets."

"Perhaps he is a relative. I think you told me that your father had a brother."

"A half brother—yes. This may be he, though, I never saw him before."

The boat struck the beach—the officer sprang out and approached the house.

As he drew closer, Charley, perceived that, though he resembled his father, in some respects, he had a sinister aspect.

On reaching the piazza he fixed a pair of light, penetrating eyes upon Charley.

"If I am not mistaken," he said, "I see my nephew before me. My name is John Jarl—your father's half brother and only living relative, save yourself. A friend, I suppose?" he added, glancing at Ben, with an ill-concealed scowl.

"Yes, a true friend, sir," replied Charley.

"I heard of my dear brother's death at St. Augustine," continued Captain Jarl. "A sudden death."

"Yes. He was struck by lightning."

"Had no chance then to leave any word for me. He told me once that if anything happened to him he would like to have you with me. I hope you will bear that in mind."

"I never heard him say so."

Though disagreeably impressed by this sinister-looking relative, yet Charley treated him hospitably.

He invited him in, and with the boys he partook of a plentiful repast.

Charley had placed on the table a bottle of wine which the captain soon emptied.

His manners were almost rude, and he used strong language.

"Come—come!" he cried, as he at length arose. "I want you to go with me aboard my craft to have a look at her."

Charley glanced at his friend Ben.

The latter's eyes and expression plainly said "No."

"I do not care to see vessels," he replied. "I seldom have visited one."

"What! you decline to have a look at your uncle's craft?" cried Jarl, frowning.

He pulled a whistle from his breast pocket and blew upon it a shrill blast.

Steps were heard in the hall.

The door opened, and the six men from the boat—dark, ruffianly-look fellows—entered the room.

"Tie them, hand and foot!" cried Captain Jarl, pointing to the boys.

The men sprang upon the lads, ere they could offer resistance, and tied their wrists and ankles with stout pieces of ratline which they had brought with them.

"I see! this villainous scheme was planned beforehand," said Charley.

"There's nothing villainous about it," answered Jarl. "I only want my rights, which I know you would not be willing to grant."

"What do you mean?"

"Your father had a large sum of money. He promised me that I should have half of it in case he died before I did."

"On the contrary, he wanted to hide his money where you could not find it."

"How do you know?"

"By certain remarks he made to me. He did not name you but I have no doubt he referred to you, when he often said to me that he was afraid a certain half relative might some day come here and try to rob him."

"You young fool! He did not mean me."

"Did he not? He said the person he feared was a bad man—that he once murdered his cabin boy and buried him in the sand on this very island!"

A light broke upon Ben's mind.

He now understood why Mr. Warner had adopted the novel plan of hiding the canvas bag full of gold coins in the breast of the little artificial skeleton.

It was in order to scare away his half brother should he come to rob him and succeed in finding the secret vault.

The sight of the skeleton like that of the boy whom Jarl had killed would overcome and terrify him.

The deathly paleness of the captain and the significant glances of the men, who were evidently aware of the dark deed, convinced Charley that he had hit the mark.

Jarl was silent for a minute. Then he gave a howl like that of a wounded wolf.

Pulling a pistol from his breast pocket, he advanced close to his nephew and held the muzzle within a few inches of his temple.

"Come!" he cried in a hoarse voice, "You know where the money is hidden. Tell me at once, or I will blow out your brains!"

CHAPTER V.

A VILLAIN'S WORK.

Naturally Charley was terrified.

He believed Jarl to be a man who would not hesitate at any crime to promote his own interests.

Young as he was, however, the lad was a rapid thinker and quick to decide.

It at once occurred to him that Captain Jarl would shoot him whether he revealed the hiding-place of the money or not.

Therefore he promptly replied:

"I have nothing to tell you."

"You mean that you refuse?"

"I do."

"Perhaps your friend here will be more accommodating," said Jarl, turning the muzzle of the pistol upon Ben.

"No, thank you," coolly answered the young sailor, "you will learn nothing from me."

Jarl replaced the pistol in his pocket.

His face darkened with rage.

"You shall both suffer for this, youngsters," he cried. "A death by the bullet were too good for such scamps."

Then beckoning to his men, he left the room.

"They are searching the house," said Ben to Charley.

"Yes, but even if they find that skeleton, they will not, I think, suspect that the money is in it. Jarl will be frightened away if he sees it."

"Perhaps so," said Ben, "but he is evidently a hardened rascal and may not so readily lose his wits as you suppose."

Meanwhile the men were heard moving about from room to room, in their search.

At length the boys heard the cellar-door open.

"There, they are going down into the cellar," said Charley.

Several hours passed.

Suddenly Ben exclaimed:

"Do you not smell smoke?"

"Yes."

"Ay—and hear that crackling sound? The rascals have set fire to the house!"

"And here we are, tied hand and foot!" cried Charley in horror.

"Hark! I hear the voices and quick footsteps of the men outside. They are hurrying off!"

"We are doomed to perish!" cried Charley.

Ben reflected for a few moments.

Dense volumes of smoke were rolling past the windows.

The crackling of the fire became louder.

Presently a tongue of flame, eating its way through the door, streamed into the room.

The heat was becoming uncomfortable.

"What shall we do? We are lost!" cried Charley.

Ben suddenly rolled himself against a leg of the table with all his force.

The table was a light one.

The leg gave way, and the top of the table sloping, knives and dishes fell clattering and crashing to the floor.

Ben turned himself flat upon his breast and fastened his strong teeth upon the handle of a sharp knife, thus keeping the edge uppermost, with the blunt side touching the floor.

"Now, Charley, saw off the lashings about your wrist," he cried.

The boy addressed turned himself over on his belly, and stretching out his tied wrists, contrived to draw the cords across the edge of the knife.

Owing to his position, this was hard and difficult work.

At last, however, the strands were so cut that a vigorous pull caused them to snap asunder.

"Good!" cried Ben. "But be quick, now! We have not a moment to lose!" he added, as the flames came streaming into the room.

Charley seized the knife and cut loose the bonds about his ankles.

Then he severed those of his friend.

Both boys were now on their feet.

Half stifled by the smoke and almost inclosed by a ring of fire, they sprang toward one of the windows.

Smoke and flame were streaming past these.

"How far are the windows above the piazza?" asked Ben.

"About ten feet, but the piazza is on fire."

As he spoke Charley opened one of the windows and seemed to prepare for a leap.

"No use," said Ben, laying a hand on his shoulder. "We cannot escape that way."

"There is no other. We will have to risk a leap through that fiery furnace."

"Where does that door lead to?" inquired Ben, pointing to one at the further side of the room.

"There was formerly a way of exit there, but it has been walled up. There were steps leading to the grounds, twelve feet below."

"That is our only way of escape. The flames have not, it is plain, yet reached that side of the building."

"But the opening, as I said, is stoned up."

"Here is something for battering down the stones," said Ben, snatching a crowbar which he had noticed lying in an open closet.

With the crowbar he soon split open the door.

The stone wall was behind it, and upon this he commenced a vigorous attack.

But the stone work was fastened together with the best cement, and the latter was slow to yield.

Fire and smoke now nearly filled the room.

Choking and gasping with the perspiration rolling down their faces, the two boys took turns with the crowbar.

At last Ben succeeded in sending one of the large stones to the ground.

The cool air rushing through the aperture probably saved the lads' lives.

They were tottering and must have fallen, to be suffocated by the smoke, but for the entrance of this draught of fresh air.

One stone being dislodged, others were soon displaced.

The opening was large enough for the boys to crawl through, and one after the other they sprang to the ground, twelve feet below.

Fortunately the ground was soft, so that they were not hurt by their leap.

As they touched the earth, a portion of the roof of the burning building fell in with a crash.

The sparks flew in all directions.

Presently the whole building was wrapped in flame.

A portion of the stone work gave way, and the progress of destruction was swifter than ever.

Finally only a great heap of stones and burning timbers marked the place where the house had stood.

The broken, fallen walls and other debris were piled several fathoms deep over the cellar.

"We cannot reach the cellar to get at the money until the ruins are cleared away," said Charley.

"No," answered Ben, as he thoughtfully gazed seaward. "But even if we did, I doubt if we would find the gold."

As he spoke he pointed out the bark, speeding along under all sail, away from the island.

"Their hurry would seem to show that they had found the gold," he remarked.

Suddenly Ben's eyes, turned to windward of the bark, lighted up with a peculiar expression.

"Hah! there is another reason for Captain Jarl's hasty flight."

"What is that?"

"Do you see that other craft to windward?"

"Ay, a brig, under everything she can carry."

"I'll wager she is a gun-brig."

"You think so?"

"Ay, what other craft would chase the outlaw?"

As he spoke there was a puff of smoke, followed by the report of a gun from the bow of the brig.

This proved Ben's conjecture to be correct.

"That shot was for the bark to heave to."

"Which she shows no sign of doing."

"No, instead she is piling on canvas to get away. Depend upon it that Captain Jarl sails a craft for which the men-of-war are on the lookout."

"You really think that this Jarl found the bag of gold in the cellar?"

"I do. His hasty flight, ere the brig could have hove in sight, out of the mist to windward, would seem to prove it."

"Well, see here. I'm not going to let that fellow run off with my gold, if I can help it."

"What do you mean to do?"

"To board that gun-brig, and tell the captain my story."

"The best thing. Here's your house in ruins, and ship-board is now the place for us. The captain of the gun-brig will do his best to get back your gold for you."

"There is a yawl of mine in the creek, yonder. Don't you think we might fetch the brig?"

"Ay, by running free and then tacking, we might intercept her."

The two boys hurried to the boat.

They soon had the sail up, and were speeding out to sea, before the wind.

CHAPTER VI.

A DARING SWIMMER.

WHEN the two friends left the island, aboard the boat, with the sheet of their mainsail hauled well aft, the brig was well to windward of them.

As they shot out diagonally from the shore, on the starboard tack, there seemed no doubt of their being able to intercept the vessel. Although Charley had called their boat a "yawl," she was somewhat larger and differently built from a craft of that kind.

She was eight feet long, with a little cuddy forward, and her mast was firmly stepped in the center.

She was a swift, stanch boat, and Ben seemed well pleased with her.

"What do you think of my yawl?" inquired Charley.

Ben smiled.

"She cannot be called a yawl. She is more like a pinnace, which is a better name for her. She is a fine little craft."

"We will catch the brig, eh?"

"I hope so," said Ben, looking a little doubtfully to windward.

There was a mass of black rack and clouds of flying mist, with white water beneath, indicating the coming of a gale.

As the young sailor spoke, the crew of the brig were seen to take in sail.

A few moments later the rack and the mist had shrouded the craft from sight.

Ben took in the mainsail and unshipped the mast.

"Here it comes," he said, "a heavy blow."

A minute later a violent gale struck the pinnace, driving her along, head to sea.

"We have lost the brig," said Charley, disconsolately.

"Ay, but I hope we will see her as soon as the gale subsides."

But the gale raged for hours.

There was a heavy sea, and the boat was tossed about wildly.

The weather continued thick, so that neither the brig nor the bark could be seen.

"We may as well get back to the island as soon as we can," said Charley.

"We can't do so, now," said Ben. "The seas are against us, and they are increasing."

In fact, it was as much as the boys could do to keep the boat from swamping.

Charley was kept constantly bailing the craft.

Suddenly Ben pricked up his ears.

"Hark!" he cried. "Do you hear that noise?"

"I hear a loud puffing, something like a whale's."

"No, it is a steamer. Keep a sharp lookout."

As he spoke, the enormous red pipe of a huge steamship was seen looming through the rack and mist directly ahead.

Ben worked at the rudder very hard.

Then he sprang up and seized an oar, trying to scull the pinnace away from the steamer's track.

Both boys shouted with all their might, but it was evident their voices were not heard.

On came the steamer, but Ben's exertions would have carried the boat clear of her had not the huge vessel suddenly fallen off half a point.

Then for the first time her lookout saw the pinnace.

His hoarse shriek rang through the craft, followed by shouts and the clang of a heavy bell.

But it was too late.

The great bow of the steamer struck the head of the boat, shivering that part of it to fragments as if it had been an egg-shell.

The bow swung up the next moment, and the steamer went rushing past the broken pinnace.

The latter had capsized, and Charley and his friend were clinging to the bottom.

The seas were now running very high.

It was too rough to lower a boat.

No help could be expected from the steamer.

Ben got astraddle of the overturned pinnace, and helped Charley to a similar position.

"Hang on to the keel for your life," he said.

"I'm afraid it is all up with us," said Charley. "We cannot long hold on. We will be washed off."

"Cheer up," answered Ben. "Here is a rope."

Then he fished up the warp attached to a ring on the inside of the boat.

With his knife he cut the warp.

He passed one end about his companion's breast and tied the part about a jagged projection of the broken bow.

This formed a sort of life-line for both boys to hold on to.

Meanwhile the spray flew thickly about the imperilled lads.

Charley often gasped, he was nearly suffocated.

Still the gale continued to rage. The evening gloom was now approaching.

Then there was a slight abating of the wind, though the seas ran high.

Suddenly the lingering light of the sun, which had set tinted the rack and the mist.

Like masses of golden vapor it went scudding to leeward and the weather cleared.

Then a cry of joyful surprise broke from both lads.

Not half a mile distant, and rolling among the seas, they beheld the brig under a close-reefed foresail.

"Ahoy! brig ahoy!" shouted Ben.

Presently a sailor aloft looked toward the boys.

His cry was heard, and the next moment the craft was heading for the boys.

On she came.

A number of brown faces were seen at the rails and nimble seamen were in the rigging.

The uniforms of the officers could be seen aft.

The brig was so nicely maneuvered that she passed within a ship's length of the boys.

"Stand by! We will throw you a rope!" shouted the captain, who now stood on the rail, holding to the lee main shrouds."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Ben.

It was still too rough to lower a boat, but it seemed as if a rope might be easily caught.

The rope was dexterously thrown by the boatswain from the gangway.

But an unforeseen occurrence hindered Ben from catching it.

The end fell within easy reach of him, but as he was about to grasp it a huge shark thrust its fangs above the surface, and catching the rope in its mouth dove down with it under water.

"Halloal how strange!" cried Charley.

"The rope probably had a little slush (grease) on it, and that was what attracted the shark, said Ben.

The brig was now carried some ships' lengths past the boat.

Another mass of fog and rack, drifting along toward her, would soon hide her from the lad's gaze.

"We will not be saved after all!" cried Charley, much discouraged.

But, just then a youth of seventeen, wearing the uniform of a surgeon's assistant, sprang from the ship's taffrail into the sea.

He had fastened a long rope, one end of which was attached to the craft, about his breast.

There was a cry of dismay from Ben.

"It'll be a risky swim with that big shark about—the one which seized the rope!" he said.

"Can we do nothing for him in case the shark should attack him?" inquired Charley.

"I'm afraid not, but I may as well be prepared."

So saying Ben unfastened from Charley the rope he had tied about him.

At the end of the rope he found a slip-noose.

This he held ready to throw, while he watched the approaching swimmer.

The young surgeon's aid struck out vigorously.

Anxiously was he watched from the brig and by the two boys astraddle of the boat.

No shark was seen as he came on.

But suddenly, just as he arrived within a fathom of the boat, the white belly of the hideous monster appeared to view near the surface."

The creature was about to dive to seize its intended victim under water.

Ben quickly raised himself as high as possible from the keel of the boat.

Then he hurled the warp he held with such dexterity that the noose caught about the fore part of the shark's body.

With a quick jerk Ben hauled it taut.

"Now, Charley, haul—help me haul! It is a pull for life!"

The two boys hauling on the rope drew the shark along some feet away from the swimmer.

Then the rope sliding along the monster's smooth body slipped off.

But the surgeon's aid had time to reach the boat ere the creature could turn to renew the attack.

As it fairly leaped out of the water on its way to the boat, a musket ball from a marine passed through its body nearly killing it and turning it away from its course.

The rope brought by the daring swimmer was attached to the broken bow, and the wrecked pinnace was hauled alongside the brig by the sailors.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRISONERS.

THE surgeon's aid, who had thus effected the rescue of the two boys, was a fine, manly-looking youth of eighteen, with dark hair and eyes, and a slender, but firmly set, active form.

The moment he and his companions reached the deck, the lieutenants and even the captain shook hands with him.

"A plucky deed," said the lieutenant of marines.

"Ay, that it was, sir," said the captain, "with that shark lying in wait for him. And a dexterous throw it was this boy" (alluding to Ben) "made with the rope."

"It's the first time I ever lassoed a shark, sir," said Ben, "though I have been going to sea now for six years."

Both boys shook hands with the surgeon's assistant and thanked him warmly for saving their lives.

Then Charley told his story to the captain.

"Ay," said the latter, when the boy had concluded, "Captain Jarl's criminal conduct does not surprise me. He is one of the most cruel and brutal of slavers who visit the African coast. His bark is the Erebus, well known to naval men, who have long vainly pursued and tried to capture him."

"You do not think, then, that you will succeed in overtaking him and getting back my gold for me?" said Charley.

"I will do my best," said the captain, smiling. "If I do capture him, and he has your gold you shall receive it."

"What a fine craft," remarked Ben to his rescuer.

As he spoke, he ran his eye along the clean, snow-white decks, the eight carronades, four on a side, the shining brasswork and ringbolts, the wide, tapering yards and the long clipper bows, as sharp as a sword fish. The name of the brig was the Greyhound, and she was from New York.

She was a large, roomy vessel, carrying, besides her eight carronades, a long Tom, or bow-chaser, forward.

Exclusive of officers and marines, her crew consisted of a hundred and thirty strong, active fellows, most of whom were good seamen.

"Ay," said William Brent, the surgeon's aid, in answer to Ben, "there is not a better craft for her size in the United States navy."

"I would like to ship aboard of her," rejoined Ben.

"I don't think you would have any difficulty in doing so," said Brent. "I will speak to Lieutenant Bright."

He did so, and Ben was soon shipped aboard the Greyhound.

After he had obtained his clothing from the yeoman, he presented himself before Charley in the usual attire of a man-of-war's man.

"So you have really shipped," said Charley. "I wanted you to sail aboard this vessel with me as passenger."

"I would be 'lost' as a passenger," laughed Ben. "It would never satisfy me. I could not rest without having a hand in the working of so beautiful a craft."

At that moment the boatswain piped, and the order came to make sail.

Ben ran aloft at the main, with others, to loosen the main-top-sail.

The captain stood on the horse-block, aft, with his glass pointed ahead, in which direction the weather had cleared.

There, far in the distance could be seen the bark, nearly hull down.

The gloom of night, however, soon hid her from sight.

Before midnight the gale had so moderated that the brig was driving along under everything she could carry.

The course of the bark when last seen was due east.

"The rascal is making for the African coast, where he has many hiding-places," the captain remarked to his lieutenant.

"Ay, sir, but I hope we will be able to fetch him before he gets there."

"We must head him off," said the captain. "He must not be allowed to get near the coast."

For this purpose the Greyhound was headed about east by south.

She was a remarkably swift sailer, and towards dawn, the dim outline of a craft could be made out about two miles off her lee bow.

"Good!" cried the captain, as he came up, called by the officer of the deck, "we have cut her off, if that craft be the Erebus."

Charley, who was on deck, listened eagerly to what was said.

The captain, looking through his night glass, soon was satisfied that the vessel he saw was the slaver.

She suddenly braced her yards and stood off to the southward.

"Try her with the bow-chaser," said Captain Rawlins.

The gun was sighted as well as could be done in the indistinct light, and as the brig now headed in full chase, the piece was fired.

But the shadowy form of the bark still was seen speeding on ahead uninjured.

The wind now showed signs of dying away.

At dawn there was a dead calm with the bark about a league distant, close to a ledge of rocks round which there ran a strong current.

"There she goes! She has struck on the bank near the ledge!" cried Lieutenant Bright, the first officer, as the bark suddenly keeled over nearly on her beam ends.

"Down with the launch and two cutters. We have her now!" cried Captain Rawlins, eagerly.

The launch and the two cutters were piped down and manned.

They contained sixty-four armed men, besides the second lieutenant and a midshipman having charge of each of the cutters, and Lieutenant Bright who was in command of the launch. Charley who had been granted permission to accompany the expedition was in the first cutter, which also contained Brent, the surgeon's aid, and Ben Belton.

The boats rapidly approached the bank upon which the bark had struck.

Captain Jarl stood looking over the forward rail furiously exhorting and gesticulating to the crews of three boats, who, with a line attached to the vessel were trying to tow her clear.

The brig's boats were within half a mile of the bark, when two curiously-shaped, funnel-like clouds, were seen driving along toward them.

"Waterspouts!" cried Lieutenant Bright, uneasily. "Lively there or they will strike us!"

Great columns of water now seemed to rise and fall under the clouds, sweeping along toward the boats.

The roar of these watery columns as they came on was like thunder.

A gun boomed from the brig, and a shot passed close to one of the waterspouts, but did not break it.

"No use, we cannot escape them!" cried the first lieutenant. "Stand firm—all!"

Scarcely had he spoken when the two gigantic water-spouts swept over the boats.

The latter spun round and round, were lifted endways, and then over they went, capsizing—turning bottom upward.

Enveloped in roaring spray and waters, the crews struggling in the sea, were nearly suffocated.

But the spouts soon passed to leeward.

The launch and the second cutter were righted, and most of the occupants of the first cutter were picked up with the rest.

The first cutter had, in fact, been stove by the force of the rushing waters, and being swept into the current, was now being carried rapidly along toward the bark.

The latter, by this time, had been towed clear.

A breeze not yet felt by the brig, shook her canvas, as her boats drew alongside.

Meanwhile, to the broken first cutter were clinging, the surgeon's aid with Charley and Ben, who had been caught by the current ere they had a chance to swim for the second cutter or the launch.

The three were carried alongside the bark by the current.

They were picked up by one of the bark's boats and were taken aboard.

Captain Jarl started back on seeing Charley and Ben as if he thought they were ghosts.

But he quickly comprehended that they had in some way contrived to get out of the burning building in time to save their lives.

"Sol sol!" he cried. "Here you are again in my clutches. It is well you escaped the fire with whole skins, but we will see if you can escape me!"

"Remember that any injury you try to inflict upon us will have to be paid for," said the surgeon's aid, pointing to the brig. "Yonder craft is a swift sailer and she will yet capture you."

"Ho! ho! we will risk it. The bark can show her a clean pair of heels!"

In fact, as the nimble seamen swarmed aloft and made sail the bark sped through the waters with a rapidity which elicited a murmur of surprise not unmixed with admiration from Ben Belton.

The three prisoners were conducted to the hold and irons were fastened to their ankles.

As Ben ere going below glanced at the brig, he perceived that the bark was increasing the distance between the two vessels.

Days passed and still the prisoners were kept in the hold.

Every morning an allowance of coarse food to last for the day was brought to them.

Thus a whole fortnight went by.

"You can be sure that the brig is in sight and has been ever since we were captured," said Brent, one afternoon.

"Why do you think so?" inquired Charley.

"Because Captain Jarl has not yet offered us any injury. As soon as he feels sure that he will escape the brig, I doubt not he will show his teeth."

CHAPTER VIII.

STRUNG UP AT THE YARD-ARM.

BRENT was right in his conjecturing about the brig's having so far kept in sight of the bark.

Do what he might Jarl could not shake off the persevering craft.

Maneuvering in the darkness of night, he would think he had eluded her.

But, next morning, lo! and behold! there she was astern, still tracking him with the unfailing skill and persistence of a true greyhound.

Thus weeks passed, and finally the bark was to the eastward of the north coast of Patagonia.

In this dreary region storms and fogs were frequent.

It was during one of these storms and while there were heavy, drifting masses of mist, that Jarl succeeded temporarily, at least, in shaking off his pursuer.

One evening when the weather cleared, he swept the seaboard with his glass, but could see no sign of the brig.

"At last," he cried, exultingly, turning to his mate. "And now we will head for the African coast as soon as the wind is favorable. But first we must dispose of those prisoners. They know too much about us to be allowed to live."

"Whatever they know has probably already been told to the brig's captain. Wherefore the use of killing them? Were it not better to set them adrift?"

"Fool, you do not seem to understand," cried Jarl, vehemently. "Know you not that, with the death of my nephew, I inherit all my half-brother's property. He has, besides his gold, a large amount of real estate in and about St. Augustine."

"But how are you, an outlawed slaver, ever to get possession of this property?"

"Through an agent, with the help of some rascally lawyer—some fellow having less conscience than most of his profession—it can be done."

"Well, why take the lives of the others?"

"I do not mean to take that of the surgeon's aid. Him I mean to set adrift."

"But the other boy—Ben Belton?"

"He is a friend to my nephew, and would be sure to make mischief. He, too, must die!"

"How will you kill them?"

"String them up at the yard-arm. It shall be done this very night. First, however, we will set the surgeon's aid adrift. We have an extra boat—the one we picked up at sea a few days ago. Aboard of that let the youth be sent off to seek his fortune," added Jarl, with a brutal laugh.

As the gloom increased, the captain gave orders for two ropes to be rove at the lee main-yard arm.

This was soon done, after which the extra boat was lowered alongside.

The captain, with a lantern, and accompanied by several men, then descended into the hold.

"Off with his irons," he said, pointing to Brent.

The irons were taken off.

"I am going to set you adrift, youngster," said Jarl.

"And my companions, too?" inquired Brent, looking toward Ben and Charley.

"No, never you mind about them," answered the captain, with a wicked laugh.

"Remember, Captain Jarl, if you take these boys' lives you will have to swing for it."

"Perhaps some others will swing before I do," said Jarl, with a significant glance at his two sailors.

The latter laughed.

This was enough for Brent. He at once comprehended that the captain meant to hang Ben and Charley at the yard-arm.

He shuddered, and again used every effort to dissuade Jarl from offering harm to the boys.

"Up and away with him into the boat!" cried the slaver impatiently.

The surgeon's aid was conducted to the deck, the main-yard was hauled aback, and he was made to descend into the boat.

A small bag of sea biscuit was pitched after him.

"Good luck to you," cried Jarl, sarcastically, as the boat's warp was cast loose. "There is not much of a sea on at present, and after you have drifted about fifty miles astern you may fall in with your brig."

Brent made no answer.

By the light of a lantern amidships he had seen the deadly preparations which had been made to destroy the lives of his young friends.

"I will save them if I can. But I fear I may not succeed," he reflected.

He allowed the boat to drift astern a few fathoms in the deep gloom which now prevailed.

Then, by cautiously sculling it, he got it close to the cabin window.

Just outside of this on the right there was a hook used for fastening, by means of a line, the clothes which were occasionally washed by the steward.

The clothes were allowed to tow in the bark's wake—a method adopted aboard most vessels for rinsing garments.

Brent fastened the boat's warp to this hook before the bark's yard was braced forward and she proceeded on her course.

It was a daring, risky deed he was going to attempt, and he braced himself manfully for the effort.

Cautiously, by means of a rope dangling over the taffrail, did he ascend to the deck from the boat.

He crouched in the shadow of the round-house at first and from thence unperceived in the deep darkness by the man at the wheel, he crept along nearly to the gangway on the outside of the bark.

There he crouched to windward under the shadow of a boat hanging on davits over his head.

At the same moment he heard not far off the peculiar humming noise of an approaching squall.

"Good! that may help me!" he reflected.

Ben and Charley had been conducted to the deck with their irons taken off.

They stood to leeward, their forms and faces lighted by a large lantern which had been brought to the lee gangway.

Both were very pale.

A sailor was already adjusting the noose of each rope which was to be placed about the lads' necks.

Others stood ready to haul, and thus to swing the boys to their doom.

"Now then, youngsters," said Captain Jarl who stood near, "if you have anything to say before you die out with it."

"I have only to say," replied Charley, "that this is a brutal, wicked deed, and that we shall be avenged. You in your turn will have to swing."

"As you deserve," put in Ben.

"That prophesy has been made by longer heads than yours time and again," laughed the captain, "and yet, see, I am still alive. Truth is, there is no sailing vessel in any navy swift enough to outmatch the Erebus."

Then he made a sign to his men and a noose was placed about the neck of each boy.

"Haul away, quick!" shouted Jarl. "Here is a squall coming down upon us!"

The men pulled the ropes, and the two boys dangled a foot above the deck.

"Make fast the ropes and jump to halliards and clewlines! Lively there!" roared Jarl as the squall came roaring close astern.

The men at once let go maintop gallant and topsail halliards.

While some of them ran aloft others sprang aft and forward.

A moment later all were mounting the rigging of the three masts.

Ben and Charley, struggling in agony, were left dangling in the gloom.

Their arms and legs twitched convulsively.

In a few seconds more life would have been extinct.

But now the young surgeon's aid, unseen by any one, as all were engaged in taking in sail, sprang over the rail to windward, and running up to the swinging boys, knife in hand, he quickly cut them down.

Each dropped like a log to the deck and fell, still struggling.

Quickly Brent loosened the ropes about their necks.

Bending over them, he could perceive that their faces had already begun to turn purple from suffocation.

He laid his hand on the heart of each.

"No, it is not yet too late," he reflected, "but I fear discovery ere I can bring them to."

He took a phial—one of several which, as surgeon's aid, he always carried in his pocket.

Some of the contents of the phial he forced between the lips of each of the lads.

Then he commenced to bathe their faces with a liquid from another phial having a pungent odor.

In about a minute Ben drew a long breath, raised himself on his elbow and opened his eyes.

Charley a moment later did the same.

"Where am I?" cried each boy in confusion.

"Hush! Keep silent for your lives!" said Brent.

CHAPTER IX.

A STRANGE VISION.

THE men were still aloft furling sail.

Jarl and his mate were both forward shouting out their orders to the men furling the jib, which had fouled in some way with the down-haul.

"Here, take some more of this," continued Brent, handing the phial he had first used to Ben. "It will strengthen you."

Ben promptly partook of the cordial.

Then it was Charley's turn. He took a deep draught.

In a few moments the boys, though still unsteady and trembling, and having some difficulty to breathe, were able to rise.

"There is a boat towing astern," said Brent. "Come. You are now able to walk aft, and by the time you get there I hope you will be strong enough to descend by a rope into the boat."

The boys staggered after their conductor, who led the way aft.

Just as they reached the taffrail they were seen by the man at the wheel.

He was about to cry out to give the alarm, when Brent, by a well-directed blow with his fist, knocked him senseless.

"Quick! Down you go into the boat!" cried the youth, as he assisted the boys to the taffrail.

Ben seized the rope and slid down into the boat.

But Charley was yet too weak to accomplish this feat.

Without hesitation Brent then drew up the lower part of the rope and fastened it about his breast under the arms.

Thus secured the boy was lowered by his rescuer into the boat.

"Where are you going to, you blasted fool?" roared Jarl at this instant to the man at the wheel. "Keep off, there, half a point! You will have us aback by the lee."

In fact the steersman, as stated, having been knocked senseless, the bark left to itself had already swung up half a point.

Receiving no answer from the man at the wheel, Jarl, with a terrible cry, came running toward the after part of the vessel.

There was no time to lose.

Brent, seizing the rope, slid rapidly down into the boat. Ben had already unfastened the part of the line fast to his friend, and now it only remained for his preserver to cast off the warp from the hook.

This he did, and the boat rapidly fell astern.

"You have saved our lives. It was a brave deed," cried Charley.

"And a risky one," added Ben.

"We have yet to battle with the squall; see, it is close upon us!" cried Brent.

A moment later the squall, roaring and howling, struck the boat.

But Brent kept her head to the sea, while Ben rapidly bailed her.

By their combined efforts, the boys contrived to weather the squall, which was not of long duration.

"How do you feel now?" inquired Brent of the lads.

"Almost as well as ever," answered Ben.

"And so do I," said Charley, "except that I have not yet got back my strength."

"You had a narrow escape. But for the coming of that squall, I know now I could not have saved you."

"It is a wonder you saved us at all," said Charley.

"Oh, no; not so. Unless the neck be broken at once, a person could be saved from death by hanging after being suspended longer than you were. It has been done more than once. My chief difficulty was to escape discovery."

"Well, here we are," said Ben, "somewhere off the stormy east coast of Patagonia. It is a question if we will escape with our lives after all."

"Ay, we have risks yet to run," answered Brent.

"How far are we from the coast?" inquired Charley.

"Upwards of sixty miles, I should say," replied Ben.

"The wind is that way. If we had a sail, we might see land by to-morrow," said the surgeon's aid.

"Here is a roll of canvas," cried Ben. "With an oar, we can put up a sort of jury-mast," he added, laughing.

With some pieces of rope found in the boat, the canvas was soon put up and spread.

The darkness was intense.

The occupants of the boat could not have seen any object on the water a fathom ahead of them.

"We are making good progress," said Brent. "Were it light enough, we could perhaps see the land ahead of us."

Several hours passed—the boys whiling away the time by talking over their situation.

All at once, at about midnight, far ahead of them, they beheld a lurid light.

In shape it was like a ball of fire, and was elevated above the sea.

Brent gave a cry of astonishment.

"As true as I'm alive, it is a lighthouse!" he cried.

"A lighthouse?" repeated the two other boys.

"Ay, a lighthouse. You can see where some of the light falls on the stones of the tower. It is the strangest thing I ever heard of!"

"Why is it strange?" inquired Charley. "Glad enough we should be to find ourselves near a lighthouse."

"It is strange, because I never heard of a lighthouse being on the coast of Patagonia."

"It may have been lately erected."

"Ay, and it must have been very lately," said Brent. "I am positive that it was not three months ago. We spoke a surveying craft, which had cruised along the coast, and nothing was said either of a lighthouse being there, or of there being any intention of building one."

"Well, as we see it, that should satisfy us," said Ben.

"I must own I am curious to have a close look at that strange lighthouse!" cried Brent. "I will hurry the boat along."

Rising, he seized and greatly increased the boat's speed by sculling her.

She now fairly seemed to fly through the water.

Suddenly the light became indistinct, appearing to sway sideways. Then all at once it vanished.

"What can it mean?" cried Brent still more astonished. "Were it not that I saw some of the tower, I should say that the lights were a sort of Jack-o'-lantern, or Will-o'-the-wisp."

"We all saw the tower, so it could not have been that," said Ben.

"Perhaps, at daylight we will see something to explain this seeming mystery," said Charley.

All watched eagerly for the dawn.

Not one of the lads now thought of sleep.

At last daylight came.

The weather was clear, but the low land of the coast could not be seen.

Nothing was in sight to account for the strange vision of the night.

There was no sign—not a single vestige of anything like a lighthouse.

Ben looked very solemn and shook his head.

He was in many respects an intelligent youth, but he was not above the superstitions of some sea-going people.

"I don't believe in ghosts and such things," he remarked, "but I believe in visions and warnings."

"You think this was a warning?" said Charley.

"Ay, a warning to us to keep away from the dreary coast we are approaching."

"True, it is not a promising place," said Brent. "It is a sort of desert, and the inhabitants are war-like Indians. I do not think they would harm us. At any rate, it is better than being adrift in a frail boat. If possible, we must try to make the small settlement of Carmen, at the mouth of the Rio Negro."

Accordingly the sail was shifted so that the boat would head to the north and westward.

"Do you think the settlement is far from here?" inquired Charley.

"I should judge it to be more than a hundred miles off. We will keep along near the coast. The weather is thick, and, in case of a violent storm, we had better make for the land."

The boys now partook of some of the sea-biscuits which had been thrown into the boat.

They then talked over the strange vision of the light-house, until they became drowsy.

Afterwards they took turns in sleeping, leaving one of the number at such times, to keep watch.

In the afternoon, Ben, who was on watch, awoke his companions.

"A violent gale is coming up from the eastward," he said.

"And yonder is the land in sight," said Brent, pointing out the line of the low coast visible in the distance. "I think we can make it ere the storm overtakes us. It is not more than two leagues off."

The boat was headed shoreward.

Charley sculled it, while Brent and Ben each pulled an oar.

A terrific tempest was approaching.

The boys reached the shore just in time to escape it, and hauled their boat far up on the beach.

As far as they could see, they now beheld only a vast sandy, barren desert.

In fact they were on the confines of what is known as the Shingle Desert.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

THE boys had drawn their boat fully fifty yards away from the shore.

They knew that the tempest would drive the seas some fathoms inland.

In fact when the storm came howling, roaring and shrieking upon them it sent the surges thundering inland almost half way to their position.

The gale continued to rage until night, when its violence slightly abated.

As before, the night was very dark.

Making a sort of tent of their strip of canvas, the boys lay down and slept by turns—one keeping watch.

Brent had the third watch.

He paced up and down near the tent, looking along and beyond the coast in the expectation of again seeing the "phantom lighthouse," as he now termed it.

But the strange vision did not appear.

There was no light—no gleam seaward to relieve the deep, impenetrable gloom.

Presently the youth was startled by the neighing of a horse, a few yards behind him.

Turning quickly, he beheld the outlines of a horse and rider.

The latter evidently did not see him owing to his being in the shadow of a hillock of sand, and dashed forward with lightning speed straight toward him.

Ere Brent could get out of his way he must have been run down had he not struck the horse a smart blow over the head with a boat hook he held.

This caused the horse to swerve and rear.

Brent could see the gleam of the rider's eyes as he bent forward.

He was a tall, powerful Indian provided with a long spear.

"Turn your horse away, or he will run me down!" cried Brent again raising the boat hook.

In the gloom evidently misconstruing the action—thinking perhaps that the youth was some enemy who meant to strike him down and rob him of his steed, the Indian hurled his long spear at him.

Brent dodged it, and the weapon grazed his side.

Then he could make out a huge club, wielded by the savage as he dashed forward to renew the attack.

As his horse went past, he was about to swing the club at the young sailor's head, when, Brent, who had picked up the spear, drove it clean through the native's body.

With a heavy thud, the savage dropped dead to the ground, while the horse turning went dashing off toward the interior.

Brent stooped over the Indian's body.

The spear had penetrated his heart, and he was stone dead.

The neighing of the horse had disturbed the two sleeping boys.

Presently Ben called out:

"Where are you, Brent? What noise was that I heard?"

"Something has happened," was the answer.

Charley, who had also been awakened, rose as Ben sprang up, and both lads were soon by their companion's side.

"Light the lantern," said Brent, after he had briefly described what had taken place.

The boat's lantern was lighted, and Ben held it over the prostrate form.

It was that of a tall, powerful Indian, with long, black hair.

He was partly attired in skins, and wore a necklace of shells.

"Ay, he is dead," said Ben.

"It is an unfortunate business," remarked Brent. "The horse will go back to the tribe to which this man belonged, and we will have a swarm of the fellows upon us, if we stay here."

"We must then get away from here as quickly as we can," said Ben.

"Ay, it cannot be done a moment too soon."

The boys proceeded to drag their boat toward the sea.

It was hard work.

They were, in fact, still tugging at the boat when they heard in the distance a noise something like the muffled beat of a drum.

It was the sound of horses' hoofs approaching.

"Here they come," said Brent.

The boys worked with energy, and at last they got their boat to the sea.

At the same moment they saw a gleam of light not far off.

It was that made by torches which were lighted by the approaching band.

The gleam fell upon many a tall, powerful form.

With their black hair streaming on the wind, swarms of Indians mounted on powerful horses were approaching.

The boys in their boat were not four fathoms from the beach when the natives reached it, and discovered the speared form of the man who had been killed.

There was a loud, hoarse cry, followed by the sound of many guttural voices.

Then, holding up their torches the Indians threw a gleam out upon the sea, revealing to them the boat and its occupants.

In an instant they ran to the water's edge, and a shower of arrows was sent toward the lads.

The missiles flew perilously near them.

Had they not bowed their heads they would have been struck by them.

Ben and Brent pulled vigorously, while Charley tended the sail, which had been hastily raised.

Further, every moment, from the shore went the boat.

The furious yells of the Indians were heard, and they were seen flourishing their clubs and waving their spears.

"We can no longer think of going anywhere ashore," said Brent.

"Those fellows will be on the watch for us. They are half mad for revenge."

"If they had a canoe on this part of the coast, they would pursue us," remarked Ben.

"That may happen yet," said Brent. "They will have a canoe after us before long."

"Halloa!" cried Charley, at this juncture, "did you see that?"

"What?" inquired Ben.

"A momentary flash in the distance, to the north of us. It was like the light of that strange lighthouse, but it vanished in an instant."

"Your fancy must have deceived you," said Brent. "You may have seen a meteor, or something of that kind."

But, even as he spoke, Charley pointed to the northward.

"There! there it is again!" he cried.

The others looked that way, and, sure enough, there again was the lurid blaze of the lighthouse!

The outline of the upper part of the tower was visible.

"That is the greatest mystery I ever heard of!" cried Brent. "Teere seems to be no explanation of it."

"It is a supernatural vision—a phantom lighthouse!" cried Ben, "and we would do well to heed the warning to keep away from the coast."

"We will have to keep away now for our lives," said Brent.

The boat was heading straight for the visionary lighthouse.

The wind had been gradually dying away, and presently a dead calm fell upon the sea.

The sail was now of no use, and the boys were exhausted.

The gleam of the lighthouse gradually became fainter, and finally it vanished.

At this moment Ben inclined his ear.

"Hark! It seems to me that I hear the sound of paddles," he said.

"Ay, the Indians must have had a canoe somewhere on the coast, and they are now in pursuit of us," remarked Brent.

As he spoke the outlines of a long canoe approaching, full of savages, could be detected through the gloom.

"It is a pull for life now," said Brent.

He and Ben again plied their oars while Charley sculled the boat.

"We will head in for the shore, and perhaps the Indians will pass us," said Brent.

"But will there not be other savages on horses riding alongshore on the watch for us?" inquired Charley.

"We will not go within reach of their arrows," answered Brent.

"Probably we will fall in with some rocks, amongst which we can conceal ourselves."

"Rocks seem to be very scarce hereabout," remarked Ben. "However, we may see some."

The boat was kept toward the shore.

A mist had added to the gloom, and the pursuing canoe could no longer be seen.

Suddenly something of a white color was seen looming up ahead.

It proved to be a bank of the fossil shells, which are occasionally met with off this coast.

The boat was directed alongside of it.

"If there were only an opening in it, it would make a good hiding place," said Brent.

"Perhaps there is a hollow inside of it," remarked Ben.

As he spoke he proceeded to remove some of the shells.

Scarcely had he done so, when from an opening thus made, half a dozen uncouth objects came rushing forth uttering hollow, gurgling roars, that might have been heard a mile off.

The huge heads with hairy manes, and the round, gleaming, fiery eyes, denoted that these were sea-lions.

Ere the boys could get the boat out of their way the animals, in their efforts to escape, struck and stove the bow to fragments.

The three thus found themselves struggling in the water.

Brent, however, soon called out:

"Here is a flat rock in the hollow under the shells. 'Come this way.'"

Ben and Charley swam into the hollow and speedily reached the flat rock upon which their friend now stood.

Then there was a rattling sound, as a number of the shells which had been disturbed by the rush of the sea-lions, fell down over the opening.

The boys were inclosed in a cavern of shells.

"S'sh!" whispered Brent, as Charley began to speak.

The steady sweep of paddles was heard close to the shell-cave.

Then there was the gleam of a torch and the sound of voices.

Through interstices among the shells the boys could see the natives in the canoe examining the wrecked boat which they pulled alongside their light craft.

CHAPTER XI.

STRANDED.

THE discovery of the broken boat seemed to surprise the savages.

They looked about them in a puzzled way, as if unable to account for it.

Apparently a consultation followed, after which they proceeded to paddle near the bank of shells, casting keen glances round them.

Finally, after a long search for the late occupants of the boat, they paddled shoreward.

"They think we have been drowned," whispered Ben.

In fact, as the Indians kept on toward the coast, it seemed as if such must have been their conclusion.

Hours passed.

Through little openings in their shell-cave the boys could see the light of dawn.

They discovered that the coast was about a mile distant.

It was lined for fifty yards with the Indians—some mounted and others standing by their horses.

All these men keenly surveyed the expanse of ocean as far as they could see.

A league distant there was a fog still resting on the water. Looking that way, Brent imagined he could see the faint outline of a vessel's hull and masts just within the edge of the mist.

He pointed it out to his companions.

As he did so, there came a breeze which wafted enough of the mist away to plainly reveal the craft.

It was the gun-brig, Greyhound.

There she lay, not more than a league distant, with her head pointed shoreward.

As the breeze came, however, her yards were braced and she was evidently preparing to head away from the coast.

"We must signal her!" cried Brent. "A pity it would be for her to leave us, now that we see her so near."

"How are we to signal her?" inquired Charley. "If we make an opening large enough to thrust an arm through, to wave a kerchief, we may bring the whole mass of shells tumbling about us, and thus showing us to the Indians."

"True," said Brent. "One of us will have to swim out to make the signal."

"But how can that be done without an opening being made?"

"There must be openings in the shell-wall, under water. Otherwise the sea lions could not have found their way here."

"I will go," said Ben. "I am a good swimmer."

He took off his hat, jacket and shoes, and dove.

There, sure enough, was a large opening under water.

He passed through it, and swimming on a few yards, raised the kerchief he had brought with him and waved it.

At first it was not seen. Suddenly, however, the brig changed her course toward him.

He saw numbers of men in the rigging, pointing in his direction.

By this he knew that he was discovered.

But the movements of the brig had also been noticed by the Indians.

Their canoe, full of armed men, was paddled seaward.

The bank of shells which had concealed the swimmer from their gaze was soon passed, and they all saw him.

A wild cry rose from them.

As the canoe was headed for the boy, several of them rose, pointing their spears toward him.

The lad was only a few yards from the bank of shells.

He dove and swam along, under water, to the opening.

In a minute he had come up inside of the shell cave.

"A narrow escape," whispered Brent, as the boy donned the garments he had taken off.

"But the brig's people will think you are drowned."

"There was no help for it," said Ben.

As he spoke, there was a puff of smoke from the brig's bow, and the hum of a shot was heard.

The shot had been aimed for the canoe, but it missed the vessel and struck the upper part of the bank of shells.

In an instant most of these were sent tumbling down, and others flying in all directions.

The three boys standing on the flat rock, were thus plainly revealed to the Indians in the canoe.

Such a shout as then went up from them was seldom heard before.

"We are lost!" cried Charley, as the canoe was swiftly paddled towards them.

But as it approached, another shot was fired at the Indians from the brig.

It was better aimed than the other.

It struck the canoe lengthways, cutting it open as if a wedge had passed through it.

Meanwhile, on came the brig.

Several of the Indians had been killed—the rest were swimming toward the boys on the flat rock.

They seemed determined to capture or kill them.

Another shot was fired. Three more of the Indians were killed. The others, now panic-stricken, made for the shore.

Then the brig ceased firing.

When she was within a mile of the boys, the launch, full of armed men, was lowered and sent to pick up the lads.

Brent recognized Lieutenant Bright in the stern-sheets.

"Well," cried the latter, when he reached the rock, "who would have expected to find you here?"

"If the first shot you fired had gone a little lower, you would not have found us, sir," said Brent, laughing.

As the boys were conveyed toward the brig, he gave an account of their experiences since being separated from their shipmates.

"That is a strange story you tell about seeing a light-house. There is no light-house on this coast," said Mr. Bright.

"Then it was not seen from the brig?"

"No; but we have not been near the coast. We have been trying to head off the bark, which we lately sighted making to the eastward."

"And did you succeed in heading her off, sir?"

"Ay, and her course was to the north and westward, when she saw us. The late calm and fog hindered our keeping up the chase."

A few minutes later the boys were aboard the brig and the captain heard their story.

The brig was then braced forward heading north.

Finally the fog cleared, when the bark was discovered under all sail about five miles off.

As usual, she kept her pursuer at a distance.

When night came the brig had not gained upon her.

It was a dark, cloudy night.

Charley was on deck near midnight, standing not far from the lieutenant of the watch, who was conversing with Brent, when, suddenly, one of the squalls, so common off this coast, came roaring and shrieking from windward.

Sail was speedily taken in, but the brig was driven along with great velocity through the roaring waters.

A keen lookout was kept.

The brig was as close-hauled as she could be in such a storm, but it was known that she was making some leeway, which carried her toward the coast.

All at once, above the howling of the gale, rang out the hoarse voice of one of the lookouts.

"Light O!"

No need to ask where away.

There it was, blazing like a lurid fire-ball ahead of the craft.

"The phantom lighthouse!" cried Brent.

"Nonsense," said the lieutenant of the watch.

He looked through his night glass and gave a cry of astonishment.

"I thought you only imagined it," he said, "but it certainly is a light-house. I can see the stone of the tower."

He called up the captain.

"What do you think of it, sir?" he inquired after Captain Rawlins had taken a long survey of the vision.

"There can be but one conclusion," was the answer. "A lighthouse must lately have been erected on one of the half sunken rocks off the coast to warn sailors from the perilous locality. We will heed the warning in time. Keep the brig off, sir."

"But that will bring the coast directly ahead of us, sir."

"Never mind, sir. Do as I tell you," answered Rawlins, a little severely.

The order was obeyed.

The captain had expected that the squall would soon pass, and enable him to veer round.

But it continued, and the brig was driven straight on.

"By the mark seven!" howled the man who had been sent to the chains to make a cast of the lead.

"Again heave away!" cried the lieutenant.

"And a half five!" was the warning shriek of the leadsman.

"Hard aport—hard!" shouted the captain. "Brace up sharp, sir!" he added to the lieutenant.

But it was now too late.

Though the violence of the squall had begun to subside the brig made many fathoms of headway ere the men could brace the yards in such a gale.

All at once a scraping, grinding sound was heard.

The craft gradually checked with her keel in a sand bank, finally stood still with her masts tottering and bending.

Then she went over nearly on her beam ends with the seas breaking over her bow.

She was stranded within a mile of the coast.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ATTACK.

"THIS comes of being deluded by that lighthouse," solemnly remarked Ben to Charley, as the two boys met in the gangway.

"That is no real lighthouse. It is a phantom vision, and I now believe that all those who allow themselves to be guided by it will get into trouble."

The gleam of the lighthouse had now faded away.

"How strange!" cried the captain. "There is some singular mystery about this affair."

"Fortunately, as the squall is passing, we will not be hurt where we are."

"No, we can tow the brig clear, I hope, before long."

The captain did not think it prudent to attempt this before dawn.

As daylight fell upon the waters, he looked in vain for the object seen on the previous night.

The weather was nearly clear, and he was astonished to discover no sign of the mysterious lighthouse.

He was about giving orders for lowering the boats to tow the vessel when he noticed half a dozen long canoes full of Indians approaching the craft from a bay, which was half hidden by sand hills and a mist.

"Ay—here come those fellows to avenge the death of the savages we shot," said Rawlins grimly. "They think as we are stuck fast and down nearly on our beam ends, that we cannot hurt them."

"They will soon find their mistake, sir," said Lieutenant Bright.

"We can use our larboard guns with effect."

"Better let them see that we can. I do not want to kill any more of them than I can help. Let the first shot be fired over their heads."

This was done, but the deluded natives, thinking the guns could not be fired with effect, came on, some of them yelling and brandishing their spears.

At the same time Bright pointed to windward.

There, to his surprise, the captain beheld the slaver's bark about four miles off, heading toward him under a cloud of canvas.

"He knows we are stranded," said Bright.

"Ay," answered the captain, in a rage, "and he is coming straight for our uplifted starboard side, from which not a gun can now touch him."

"Has he any guns aboard?" inquired Bright of Brent, who stood near.

"I did not see any, sir. But they may have been concealed. I

noticed several tarpaulins carefully covering some objects forward and aft. By the looks, if they were guns, I do not think they would have been very large ones."

"Large enough they are, I'll warrant, to do us mischief," said the captain.

In fact the situation began to look serious.

"With those Indians coming on one side, and the bark attacking us on the other, stranded as we are, it seems to me we stand a poor chance," remarked Charley to Ben.

"There will have to be some sharp fighting for us to escape," replied Ben.

The bark continued to approach.

"The first thing to do is to drive off those Indians," said the captain.

Instant orders were given to that effect, and the gunners were soon at their stations.

Then piece after piece sent forth its thunder, and the missiles, well directed, killed a number of the Indians and shattered five of the canoes.

But the others now paddling swiftly, contrived to get to windward, out of range.

At the same moment, the bark, having arrived within a mile of the brig, was hove to.

Four concealed ports were opened, and her shots from as many fourteen-pounders, came humming about the Greyhound.

Perceiving that the bark's people fired over their heads at the brig, the Indians stood up and gave shouts of approval.

A shower of well-directed arrows were sent curving through the air, to the deck of the war-craft.

Several of the men were wounded by the missiles, and Brent was soon busy assisting the surgeon in attending to the hurt seamen.

As the arrows were sent in a curve, they not come with force the they would have had if discharged in a straight line.

The sailors, therefore, were generally enabled to avoid the barbed shafts as they fell.

Meanwhile, the shot from the bark was doing mischief.

Crashing through the elevated bulwarks of the brig it sent many a poor fellow to his last account and badly wounded others.

The surgeon's task in attending to the wounded became more difficult every moment.

Brent exerted himself to the utmost.

With rolled up sleeves, he assisted the surgeon in administering remedies, in using the bandage, the probe, and the knife.

Charley not liking to be idle, helped some of the hurt men to the cock-pit.

Heedless of shots and arrows, he tendered his aid wherever it was necessary.

At length Captain Jarl aboard the bark was seen evidently addressing some of the Indians who had glided alongside of his vessel in one of the canoes.

That he had been advising and assisting them was afterwards shown.

Flights of arrows with masses of blazing, tarred oakum attached to them were soon falling in fiery showers upon the brig. Some of them alighting in the rigging set fire to the tarred ropes.

But Ben Belton and others, running aloft with the ship's hose, put out the fires as fast as they appeared.

Finally it seemed as if the Indians had discharged all the arrows they possessed.

Then the powder-magazine hatch was opened for the passing up of more ammunition.

By elevating two of his starboard guns Captain Rawlins was enabled to bring them to bear upon the bark.

There was something of a swell now rolling along off shore, and this occasionally depressed the starboard side of the brig.

Ere the bark could haul out of range of the stranded craft, her fore-topmast and jib-boom were sent crashing into the water.

The moment the Erebus was out of reach of the brig's guns she continued to keep up her annoying fire.

All at once a burning arrow came curving over the Greyhound's deck and fell through the hatchway of the powder magazine.

A cry of dismay rose from the sailors.

"We shall all be blown up!" cried the lieutenant of marines.

But, as quick as a flash, Ben Belton darted aft, and plunged through the magazine hatchway.

The point of the burning arrow was sticking in the side of one of the powder kegs.

In another instant it seemed as if all that brig's crew must be sent to eternity.

This certainly would have happened but for the deed of reckless daring performed by Ben Belton.

Right among the powder-kegs did he leap and pluck the blazing arrow ere the fire had reached the powder.

He extinguished the blazing oakum attached to the shaft and brought it on deck.

"Well done!" cried Captain Rawlins. "I will not forget your good conduct."

The shrill piping of the boatswain's whistle now was heard.

"First, second and third cutters away!" bawled the boatswain.

A moment later the launch was also piped down, and a swivel was arranged in the bow.

The captain had decided to try and board the bark, as the only means of putting an end to the mischief she was inflicting upon him.

Charley having obtained permission slid into the first cutter v. Ben Belton.

He had secured a cutlass to his side, and all the rest of the crews, similarly armed, bundled to their places.

"Give way!" was the order, and the boats were soon swiftly speeding toward the bark.

The crews of these boats, counting officers and men, numbered about ninety.

The Indians, as they approached, sent a shower of spears toward them.

There were in all about fifty savages who seemed determined to intercept the boats.

With spears and war-clubs they made a furious attack upon them, and several sailors were wounded by the weapons.

CHAPTER XIII.

A TIMELY ARRIVAL.

A WELL-DIRECTED discharge of small arms from the boats, presently, made great havoc among the Indians.

They fought desperately a few minutes longer, however, wielding their clubs and spears with some effect at close quarters.

A gigantic savage had the point of his spear against Charley's breast, and was about to drive the barb through his body, when Ben, with a blow of his cutlass, cut off the lower part of the spear's handle.

The savage then swung his club so dexterously that it would have dashed out the young sailor's brains had not Lieutenant Bright sent a bullet from his pistol through the Indian's head.

This Indian was one of the caciques or chiefs, and as he fell headlong into the sea, his followers began to retreat.

Captain Jarl from the bark, now perceived that the boats would succeed in boarding him, as there was but a light breeze and he had lost his fore and main-topsails.

Hitherto he had refrained from firing at the boats, lest he should hit the Indians who were in the way.

But, the moment he noticed that they were paddling off, he was enraged, and shouted to his gunners:

"Fire away, men! Aim for the boats and never mind if you do hit those cowardly savages!"

He was obeyed.

The first shot, splitting the head of a canoe, passed on and grazed the first cutter—the foremost boat.

Shot after shot was fired, and, at the same time, the bark was headed off under such canvas as she could carry.

Jarl gave way to his wrath in loud expletives to his gunners, who as yet, had not succeeded in hitting one of the boats, though their shot had killed a number of the Indians.

Pushing one of the men aside, he sighted a gun with his own hands.

"Now, then, fire!" he shouted.

The roar of the piece was followed by the hum of the shot, and splinters were seen to fly from the head cutter.

The ball had struck the starboard gunwale of the boat, and crashing through it, had passed between Charley and Ben.

The vessel at once filled and sank, but the crew were soon picked up by the launch.

The freshening of the wind sent the bark on her way, and her next shot fell short by several feet of the boat it was aimed for.

At the same moment the coxswain uttered an exclamation of dismay and pointed astern.

The canoes of the savages, reinforced by several others from the shore, were heading swiftly toward the starboard side of the brig.

"They are going to board the brig!" cried Lieutenant Bright.

"There are but about thirty men left there to oppose them. Round with the boat, coxswain."

All the boats were headed back toward the brig.

Meanwhile the bark continued on her course.

As there seemed so be a sign of the wind's changing round toward the west, Jarl decided to give the now mist-covered coast and vicinity a wide berth, lest he should be carried ashore.

"Lively, lads! pull with a will!" cried Bright. "See! the rascals have already reached the brig and are clambering up her sides."

A moment later the sounds of a desperate conflict were borne from the Greyhound.

The boats fairly seemed to fly.

Finally they arrived alongside the brig, and the men sprang aboard.

It was a timely arrival. Overpowered by numbers, with a third of the vessel's occupants killed and wounded, the remainder had retreated aft, where, headed by the captain, with the mariners now using their clubbed muskets, they were making a last desperate stand.

The rush of Bright's party upon the Indians was like that of an avalanche.

The savages were driven right and left, and, in a few moments, the deck was literally covered with their dead.

Ben and Charley had an opportunity to use their cutlasses.

Four powerful Indians had sprang upon them, and aimed their spears to pin them to the deck.

Charley dashed one of the spears aside, but another passed through his jacket, and the point sticking in the bulwarks, he was thus held fast.

The native who had made the thrust fell upon him and clenched him by the throat.

This saved the lad from instant death, as the Indian was thus in the way of the other spears aimed at the youth.

Ben, perceiving this, attacked one of the three natives. Dodging a blow from a spear, he passed his cutlass through his body. At the same moment the pressure of the panic-stricken horde retreating before Bright's party, drove the boy's other two opponents, who had been about to spear him, back against the rail, where they were bayoneted by a couple of marines.

But the Indian who had clutched Charley by the throat, seemed determined to put an end to his life ere he died.

Half a dozen cutlasses had already pierced his form.

Still, however, he held on to his intended victim.

He had now seized the latter by the hair with one hand, and was forcing his head far back, intending to break his neck.

This he would have done had not the captain placed the muzzle of his pistol against the fellow's temple and fired, killing him instantly.

When thus released, Charley was almost black in the face.

But a bucket of salt water, dashed over his head by Ben Belton, soon revived him.

The retreating Indians had now sprung overboard, and some swimming, others in their canoes, were making for the shore.

As soon as the decks were cleared, and the men had been allowed a spell of rest, the work of towing the brig clear of the sandbank was commenced.

The tide having risen, this task was finally accomplished, and the Greyhound, under a perfect cloud of canvas, now went roaring through the waters in chase of the slaver, which had caused her so much trouble.

Jarl had not yet been able to get up new topmasts, and the brig gradually gained.

Toward dusk she was almost within gunshot of the chase, when the mist thickened upon the waters, hiding her from view.

It was nearly midnight ere the mist cleared before a moderate gale.

No sign of the bark could be seen through the gloom. As the wind was blowing landward, the brig was close-hauled, the captain hoping, by means of short tacks, to escape being driven ashore.

All at once a light was seen off the lee bow.

"The lighthouse again!" cried the astonished captain.

There, sure enough, it was apparently not more than a mile off!

A murmur of superstitious wonder circulated amongst the crew.

The light burned steadily, and the radiance it threw out revealed what appeared to be the stones in the upper part of the tower.

"I will solve this mystery!" cried the captain.

He gave instant orders for heaving to, and the second cutter was piped down.

"You will take command," said the captain to Bright, "and we'll try to reach the strange vision."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Bright.

"Meanwhile I will head to windward as much as possible. If the gale shows signs of increasing, I will fire the recall signal. Until you hear that, you will persevere in your search."

But two of the cutter's crew now showed signs of hanging back. They were elderly tars, and were very superstitious.

"Into the cutter with you, men!" cried Bright, sternly.

The two had always hitherto been found true to their duty.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir," said one, as he saluted, "we'd sooner be hung at the yard-arm than go in chase of a phantom lighthouse, which this can be nothin' else, sir."

Both he and his companion trembled from head to foot.

"Never mind," said the captain, who was willing to humor the two old tars. "Send others in their places, Mr. Bright."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Bright, touching his cap.

Charley, who stood near, promptly advanced, and Ben Bolton quickly followed.

"I would like to go," said the former.

"And I, sir," said Ben, saluting.

"Very well. Take them, Bright," cried the captain.

The two boys were quickly in the cutter, and away it went in chase of what most of the crew believed to be a phantom lighthouse.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DEATH SIGNAL.

THE cutter, pulled toward the strange lighthouse, made good progress.

"Ay, there it is! We will solve the mystery at last!" cried Bright, as the boat drew every moment nearer to the light.

It seemed as if the cutter was not more than half a mile from the object, when the light vanished, as it had done before.

"Never mind. Pull ahead, lads. If there is a lighthouse there, we are sure to reach it whether it shows a light or not."

A quarter of an hour after Bright had thus spoken, the boat suddenly struck something with a crash.

This proved to be a sharp, sunken rock, about a mile from the coast.

Charley, who was standing close to the gunwale, was thrown headlong into the sea by the concussion.

At the same moment the cutter capsizing, was borne shoreward, with its occupants clinging to it.

The boat's lantern being thus extinguished, Charley could not see his late companions through the gloom, though he could, for a while, hear their voices.

He tried to swim in the direction of these voices, but he was caught by a sea and hurled with some violence against a low mass of rocks.

Partly stunned, he yet had sense enough left to creep upon a rock a few feet above the surface of the sea.

The water washing over his face soon revived him.

He staggered to his feet and saw before him another rock much higher than the one he occupied.

Up this rock he climbed. It was nearly twenty feet high, and he found a sort of cave or hollow just under the summit.

He could not see the cave in the gloom, but he could feel its sides with his hands.

Suddenly the latter came in contact with something which the boy judged to be a barrel, though, in the dark he could only dimly make out its shape.

Creeping about the cave he also felt a box and some breakers (small casks) of fresh water.

Hours passed. Several times he heard the brig's signal gun in the distance. Dawn came at last and afforded him sufficient light to examine the contents of the box.

He then beheld a few herrings in the bottom of the box, and he discovered that the barrel evidently contained oil. There were also some matches on a rocky shelf.

It was plain that the cave, which was of small dimensions, had been occupied and that recently.

There was a broken pipe on the floor, and a half plug of tobacco lay in the corner.

To a jutting point of rock near the mouth of the cave was tied a strong rope.

There was at one end of it a loop, as if made to fit about some person's body.

In an instant Charley comprehended that this rope had been used to keep the late occupant of the cave from being washed away when the seas ran high.

What had become of the person who had been here?

How long had he remained in this dreary hollow?

Charley asked himself these questions more than once?

Gazing from the opening of the cave, he could perceive that a mist lay upon the water, hiding it on all sides of the rock to the distance of a number of fathoms.

Where the Greyhound now was, or what had become of his companions who had drifted off with the stoven cutter, he could form no idea.

At noon he noticed that the water, which had been nearly twenty feet below the cave when he first entered it, had risen half way toward it.

Owing to some formation of the rocks at the bottom of this part of the sea, the surface near the base of the rock was now subject to a violent commotion.

"I wonder if this always happens here at high tide?" thought the lad. "The water seems to run in different directions."

He sat looking down at the bubbling sea and the opposing currents with much curiosity.

It seemed as if the water at the bottom was rising with great force in foam and spray to the top.

All at once a cry of surprise escaped him.

Gradually from the sea there rose a cylindrical stone pillar! It had evidently been lying over on its side under water. Now it continued to rise until, it was in a perpendicular position about fifteen feet above the surface.

It was a curious pillar, bearing hieroglyphics upon it, and having a round, circular opening near the top.

From this opening dangled a long rope.

The rope was within reach of Charley's hand from the jutting platform of rock in front of the cave.

The idea occurred to the boy that this pillar was the mysterious lighthouse which had so puzzled him and his companions.

But the light which had been seen—how was that to be accounted for?

As he gazed at the tower, he felt a strong desire to climb to the opening and look into it.

At length he resolved to make the ascent.

He seized the rope, and in a few minutes had climbed to the aperture.

Then he beheld a sight which so startled him that he came near letting go of the rope and dropping into the sea.

In the opening before him, which was perhaps large enough to contain two persons, he beheld the attenuated form of a gigantic, half-naked negro.

The latter was dead.

His glazed, staring eyes bulged like two white balls from their sockets, and his dazzling white teeth were visible between his parted lips.

Tightly clutched in his rigid fingers was a large, globular lantern, which he held by a handle at the top.

Instantly something of the truth flashed upon Charley's mind.

The barrel of oil in the cave and the lantern in the negro's hand were suggestive of the meaning of the light which had been seen, and had thus given to the pillar the appearance of a lighthouse.

The negro, whenever the pillar rose from the sea, would climb to the opening and light the lantern as a signal, hoping, probably, that some vessel's captain would see it and send a boat to pick him up.

The form of the dead man was tightly jammed in the opening, the roof of which was very low.

It seemed evident that, in trying to leave the low aperture, he had thus been caught.

But what had caused his death?

This apparently was of recent occurrence, as he had shown his signal during the preceding night.

It was not long ere Charley comprehended that the man had been drowned.

The pillar, as the tide, which was now at its highest, began to recede, heeled gradually over.

The boy rapidly descended by the rope and swung himself to the rocky platform in front of the cave which he had previously occupied.

Meanwhile the pillar tipped over sideways, further and further, until finally it touched the sea, beneath which it slowly sank.

"How strange!" reflected Charley. He noticed that the turbulence of the water gradually subsided near the rock.

As it did so, he imagined he could discern the faint outline of the pillar a little more than a fathom beneath the surface.

Hour after hour passed.

The mist still lay upon the ocean and the boy therefore remained in ignorance of the fate of the cutter's crew, as well as of the whereabouts of the brig.

Late at night the mist cleared, and Charley could see a light not far distant.

The night was very dark, and thinking the light came from the brig, the boy wished he had something to use for a signal.

At midnight, with the rising of the tide, up came the stone pillar again from beneath the ocean.

Charley thought of the lantern held by the drowned negro, in the aperture near the top of the tower.

He shuddered at the idea of facing the dead man again, but he nevertheless resolved to light the lantern which would serve for a signal.

He procured some matches, and by means of the dangling rope, again climbed to the opening.

Then he easily lighted the lantern, the wick of which had remained nearly dry, as the fittings around it were almost water-tight.

Suddenly he imagined he heard the sound of approaching oars.

The noise drew rapidly nearer.

Voices upon the rock soon indicated that the boat's crew were there.

"Halloa! Who's up there in that tower?" came a hoarse voice.

Charley remained silent.

He recognized the voice of Captain Jarl.

The latter, receiving no reply, began to climb the dangling rope.

The boy above now crouched low and contrived to partly conceal himself behind the rigid form of the black.

The moment the captain's face appeared above the edge of the opening and beheld the body of the dead negro holding the lantern, he uttered a cry of superstitious terror.

Down he went, sliding down the rope back to the rock below.

"God help us! It is one of the slaves of the steamer we sank!" he cried to his men. "One of the blacks, stone dead, holding a lighted lantern! It is a judgment upon me—a warning of some misfortune about to overtake us!"

"Ay! a death signal—a death signal!" cried one of the crew.

"Back to the bark, for your lives!" roared Jarl. "We must do our best to pass that accursed brig, that we may get far away from this ghostly tower! Only through some unearthly agency could that tower have come up from the bottom of the sea, and that dead man have lighted his lantern!"

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

CHARLEY could now hear the boat rapidly receding. All at once, looking down, he fancied he saw a dim form clamber upon the rock below.

"Charley! Charley!" came the voice of his friend, Ben Belton, "is that you up there?"

"Oh, Ben, so it is you!" answered Charley. "Come up here! Come quickly! You can climb by the rope dangling down from here."

Ben, active as a young panther, climbed to the opening. There was just room for him to place himself near the edge of it.

On seeing the dead black still clutching the lighted lantern he gave a cry of superstitious horror.

"What does this mean?" he gasped.

"God only knows! But I have no doubt there is some natural cause for the rising of the tower from the sea."

"But the dead man. How could he light the lantern?"

"He did not. I lighted it."

"But he must have lighted it ere you came here."

"Ay—don't you see?—he was alive then. But he became jammed in this tower, so that he could not get out ere it sank, and he was drowned."

"Sank? What do you mean?"

Charley explained. In fact, Ben soon had a chance to see the tower gradually heel over and finally sink.

He and Charley had now descended back to the rock.

"Ay, ay," gasped Ben. "There's something supernatural about this. How could that tower come up like a live thing from the sea, go back and come up again?"

"In my opinion it is fast to the sunken steamer."

"What steamer?"

Charley then described Jarl's visit to the tower, and what he had heard him say.

"Ho! ho! I begin to see into things a little!" cried Ben.

"And now," said Charley. "Tell me about the rest of the cutter's crew. Where are they?"

"I don't know. When we drifted ashore we could see the forms of many Indians through the gloom not far off.

"We concealed ourselves among some sand hills, and in the day became separated from my shipmates. I found a sort of hole in the sand into which I crept. Presently the sand fell all around me and I feared I would be buried. I tried to burrow my way out. For hours I worked without success. I had to pause now and then to rest, but at last I got out. A long time had passed and it was night.

"I walked about vainly looking for my shipmates.

"Finally I sat down to rest and fell asleep.

"When I awoke it was midnight. I saw the light of this tower and resolved to swim for it.

"Half way to it the water was shallow enough for fording. I swam the rest of the distance and reached this rock."

The two boys now partook of some of the herrings in the box in the cave. Then they quenched their thirst from one of the several breakers (small casks) of fresh water in the rocky retreat.

"That negro must have been the only one saved from the sunken steamer," remarked Ben. "He must have remained here a long time. Probably he fished up the breakers of fresh water and other things from the wreck."

"We must get a look at that wreck in the morning," said Charley.

Then, feeling drowsy, he lay down and slept while Ben kept watch.

Dawn came with a mist.

Charley awoke.

"Now for a look at the sunken steamer," he said.

"I will go down," said Ben. "I am stronger than you."

As he insisted, Charley finally consented.

He tied an end of one of the coils of rope about his friend's breast, and down went Ben beneath the sea.

He discovered that the water here was but about three fathoms deep.

In the rift of a sunken rock he saw the steamer.

She was not a very large craft, and she lay swaying almost imperceptibly, in the rift of the rock.

Numerous ropes, trailing over her side, had caught about ledges of the rock.

These, evidently, prevented her from drifting away from the place.

She lay over nearly on her beam ends, and the stone tower, which was firmly lashed to her deck, rested on another rock that rose opposite to the one to which she was fast.

In this rock there was a deep black hole or pit, from which rose numerous bubbles.

This, probably, was the cause of the commotion of the water at the surface of the sea, whenever the tide began to rise.

The water, as the boys afterwards perceived, would then shoot up with tremendous force from the pit, thus lifting the steamer to an upright position, and causing the tower attached to it, which was a light one, to rise to a perpendicular position from the surface of the sea.

When the tide receded, the water sinking back into the hole, would cause the sunken steamer to again heel over and again bring the tower with it beneath the surface.

It was near noon, Ben and Charley stood in front of the cave, when the booming of guns rapidly fired, was heard out at sea.

"That comes from the Greyhound, from the brig!" cried Ben.

Presently the noise of the firing ceased, and a cheer was faintly heard in the distance.

"What does that mean?" said Charley.

"I may be mistaken," said Ben, "but I think it meant that the brig's people have at last captured the bark."

When a few minutes later the fog cleared away, it was discovered that Ben was right.

About a league distant, the brig was seen alongside of the bark, whose three topmasts had been shot away.

In his hurry to give the tower a wide berth, Jarl had passed close to the brig which, disabling his craft with her guns, had thus succeeded in effecting her capture.

As the tower was now again above the sea, Ben climbed to the opening and waved his kerchief as a signal.

From this elevated point the signal was soon descried by the crew of the brig and a launch was sent off to the rock.

Captain Rawlins was in the stern sheets.

The tower had previously sunk into the sea again and Ben was now on the rock with Charley.

When the captain arrived it did not take the boys long to make explanations.

"It is a wonder the Indians did not come here and capture the negro. They must have seen the mysterious tower before now," said the captain.

"Probably the Indians who are superstitious, believed it was something supernatural and so would not venture here, sir," suggested the midshipman who had accompanied the captain.

"That must account for their not coming near the beach opposite to this place," remarked Ben Belton, "though they were a short distance off. We could see them as I said, when we reached the shore, after the cutter was stoven."

"Ay," cried the midshipman, "and there they are—all the rest of the crew of the cutter making signals!"

He pointed shoreward, where, on a sand-spit, Lieutenant Bright and his men were visible.

In the distance a horde of savages could be seen but they did not advance nearer to the coast.

This proved the truth of the young officer's assertion that the In-

dians had a superstitious terror of that part of the beach near which the strange tower at intervals rose and disappeared.

The launch was headed shoreward with Charley and Ben now in it, and the lost cutter's crew were picked up.

The boat finally returned to the brig.

Jarl and his men now were prisoners aboard that craft. The slaver's captain had been mortally wounded by a shot, and he lay dying.

When questioned about the sunken steamer he maintained a sullen silence.

His mate, however, made the required explanation.

The steamer's name was the Comet. She had been sent from San Francisco by some antiquarians to the south coast of Lower Guinea for a small stone pillar—one of the ancient monuments brought from Butna, and which had been sold to the persons desiring to obtain it as a curiosity.

The pillar was finally got aboard the steamer and lashed securely to her deck. As the structure was partly hollow it was comparatively light and was easily moved.

Just as the steamer was about getting under way a number of slaves who had contrived to escape from Captain Jarl, then in the same port, and had sprung into a long canoe, reached her side and clambered aboard.

The steamer's captain—an abolitionist—readily gave them food and shelter, and steamed away for San Francisco with them aboard.

Captain Jarl pursued her.

The steamer's machinery having become damaged he contrived to keep her in sight in clear weather.

But many days passed ere he finally arrived within gunshot of her.

This happened off the north coast of Patagonia.

His guns made fearful havoc.

All the steamer's crew were probably killed or wounded, and she finally sank, as a shot struck her below the water line.

At the same moment a fog came up.

Jarl searched in vain for survivors of the craft.

Finally, when the mist cleared, and no sign of the vessel or of the slaves he desired to recapture, could be seen, he sailed on his return to the African coast.

Doubtless all the slaves, except the solitary negro who has been alluded to, perished in the sunken craft.

The one who escaped must have hidden among the rocks, while Jarl was making his search.

"And now," said Captain Rawlins, turning to Charley, "I suppose you would like to hear about your gold? I regret to say that Jarl informs me he obtained it from your house before he set fire to the building, but that he threw it overboard, just before I captured his craft, sooner than have it fall into your hands."

"Ay, look for it, you young scoundrel, at the bottom of the sea!" snarled the dying man, as his eyes began to glaze.

Then his head sank back and he expired.

His body was, in the usual manner, launched overboard that same day.

Of course, Charley much regretted the loss of his gold.

Ben sympathized with him.

Suddenly it occurred to the young sailor that Jarl had spoken falsely.

The mate and others, when he questioned them, said they had not seen Jarl throw the treasure overboard, but that he might have dropped it out of the cabin window.

"You know, then, that he had brought it to the bark?" Ben said to the mate.

"I know nothing about it. I have no more to say," was the sullen response.

He refused to answer any more questions on the subject.

"Charley," said Ben to his friend when they next met, "your money may still be where you left it—in the cellar now buried beneath the ruins of your burned house. Jarl may not have found it after all."

Charley started.

"I hope that may be so. But why did he say he had thrown it overboard from the bark?"

"Because even at the last moment he wanted to 'balk' you—did not want you to enjoy the benefit of your fortune."

Charley, having spoken on the subject to Captain Rawlins, the latter promised to land the boy upon the island where he had formerly lived and help him search for the buried money.

He kept his word.

The Greyhound on her home passage with the captured bark, manned by a detail from her crew, eventually hove to off the little isle upon which were the ruins of the lad's former home.

A party of sailors with Charley went ashore and soon cleared the ruins from the cellar. Ben Belton and Charley, with crowbars, were presently busily engaged in trying to find the gold.

To their intense satisfaction the artificial skeleton was at last discovered with the bag of gold in it, exactly as they had left it months before.

They returned aboard the brig with the treasure, and the craft continued her course.

A few weeks after she arrived in New York, where the captured slavers were surrendered to the proper authorities, by whom they were sentenced to a long term of imprisonment.

Some years later Charley and Ben Belton entered into business as ship owners.

Ben, for his gallant conduct in saving the brig from being blown up at the time the burning arrow entered her magazine hatchway, had been promoted.

He finally received a good salary and contrived to save money, with which he formed a partnership with his friend.

The business prospered, and the two partners, now happily married, lead a pleasant life ashore, far different from the one so full of peril and hardship, while they were in search of the slaver and of the strange PHANTOM LIGHTHOUSE.

[THE END.]

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